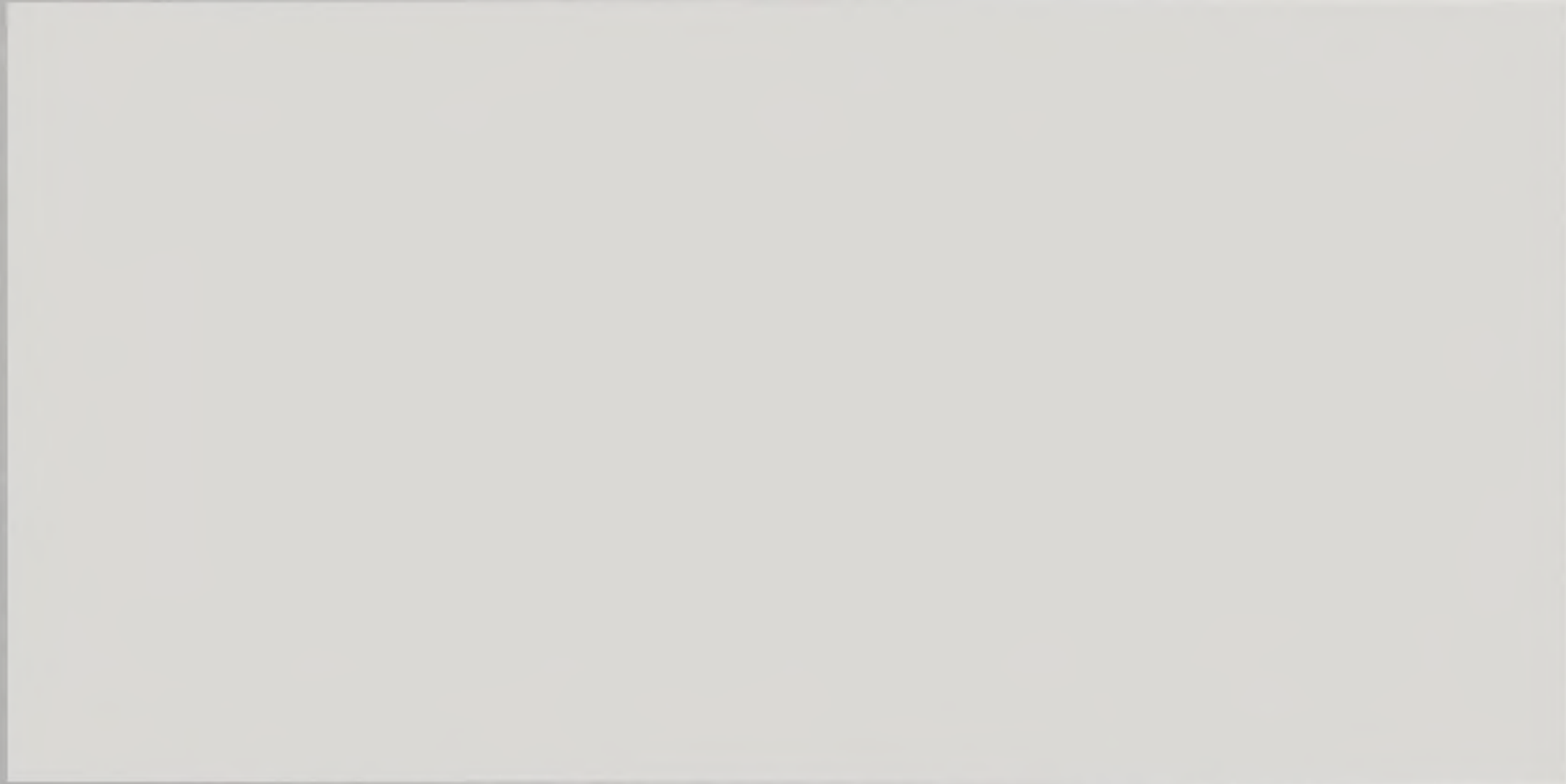
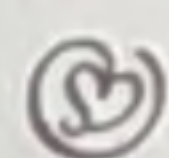

A Trip to the Land of Scholars and Saints

IN THE COMPANY OF SHAYKH AL-ISLAM
MUFTI MUHAMMAD TAQI USMANI

MUHAMMAD IBN ADAM AL-KAWTHARI



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



*Dedicated to arguably
the greatest hadith scholar,
Amīr al-Mu'minīn fi 'l-Ḥadīth,
Imam Abū 'Abdillāh
Muhammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī,
who epitomizes the scholarship
of Central Asian lands in general,
and Uzbekistan in particular.
May Allah Most High be
well pleased with him,
Āmīn.*

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Foreword

BY SHAYKH AL-ISLAM MUFTI
MUHAMMAD TAQI USMANI
(MAY ALLAH PROTECT HIM)

With the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Very-Merciful

My dear friend Mawlānā Muhammad ibn Adam joined me on a trip to Uzbekistan in April, 2019. Uzbekistan is part of '*Mā warā' al Nahr*', which was inhabited for much of Islam's first millennium by legends whose contributions still remain alive and indispensable to the *Umma*: Imam Bukhari's *Saḥīḥ* and Imam Tirmidhi's *Sunan* are examples (may Allah *ta'āla* have mercy on them).

Mawlānā Muhammad has written an account of this trip, with notes on the historic significance of the places we visited and short biographies of its personalities. I have paged through this travelogue and found it to be very beneficial for the English readership in rekindling its relationship with Islam's heritage.

May Allah *ta'āla* reward the author and approve of this valuable endeavour; and may He destine it to be beneficial for its readers. *Ameen*.

MUHAMMAD TAQI USMANI

24 Rabi' al-Thani, 1441 / 22 December, 2019

Introduction

With the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Very-Merciful. All praise is for Allah, Lord of the worlds; and peace and blessings be on our master, Muhammad, his family and Companions.

The region of Central Asia holds an important and sentimental place in the hearts of Muslims across the world. Students of Islamic knowledge (*ṭullāb al-ʿilm*), in particular, have a special affinity and emotional attachment with the history, heritage and scholarship of this region—given it has produced some of the greatest scholars of hadith (*muhaddithūn*), jurists (*fuqahā*) and saints (*awliyā*) of our *Umma*, and was once the headquarters of Islamic learning. The term historically used to refer to this region, '*mā warāʾ al-nahr*' (lit. 'that which lies beyond the river'), is frequently found in our books. Regions and cities such as Samarqand, Bukhara, Shash, Tirmidh, Fergana, Khuwarizm are mentioned frequently, and names of luminaries such as Bukhārī, Tirmidhī, Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī, Al-Marghīnānī, Abū 'l-Layth al-Samarqandī, Shāshī, Nasafī and Ibn Sīnā are on the tongues of every person who has some degree of affiliation with Islamic learning.

The various Muslim States of this region, which remained under the rule of the Soviet Union (officially, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics—USSR) for over seventy years and regained independence after the collapse of the former socialist/communist state, include: Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan.

They are now all independent, sovereign countries. This entire region was once known as Turkistan—a major centre of Islamic learning from where great masters of hadith, *fiqh* and other Islamic disciplines hailed, and from whose knowledge the entire Muslim *Umma* is benefiting today. Of these states, Uzbekistan is probably the richest in terms of Islamic history and scholarship and is home to great historical centres of Islamic learning, such as Bukhara, Samarqand, Tirmidh, Fergana and Tashkent.

In view of the above, it had been my longstanding desire to visit Central Asia and, in particular, Uzbekistan. Any student of Islamic knowledge like me, who grew up hearing the names of these centres of Islamic learning and the great masters they produced, would undoubtedly have a natural desire to visit these lands. As such, when I discovered that a trip had been arranged for my beloved teacher and mentor, Shaykh al-Islam Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him), to visit Uzbekistan, I was eager to join him. The attraction was twofold: visiting a country with so much history and, secondly, spending time in the company of our beloved Shaykh.

Al-hamdu lillah, I was fortunate to visit Bosnia in his company during June 2018, and it was on this trip that he informed me of his plans to visit Uzbekistan. His visit was originally scheduled for October 2018, but due to other commitments it was postponed. Upon discovering that it was rescheduled for April 2019, I was unsure if it would be appropriate to accompany him, given it was only a few days after an assassination attempt on him in Karachi, Pakistan—even though he had granted me permission for the original October trip. I hesitantly phoned and sought his permission, once again. *Al-hamdu lillah*, not only did he grant me permission, he, in his usual affectionate and cheerful manner, expressed his pleasure that I was wishing to join him. I immediately began preparation for this historic trip.

In this travelogue, I have endeavoured to compile the history and relevant information related to the various places we visited. In addition, beneficial points learned from our dear and respected Shaykh

Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him) during the trip have been gathered, including translations of almost all of his speeches which he delivered at various locations.

I pray Allah Most High accept this humble effort and make it beneficial for the readers, *Āmīn*.

MUHAMMAD IBN ADAM AL-KAWTHARI

27 Rabi' al-Thani, 1441 / 25 December, 2019

Introducing Uzbekistan

Prior to describing the details of our trip, it would be informative to introduce Uzbekistan and briefly mention its history. Uzbekistan is currently an independent, sovereign state known officially as the 'Republic of Uzbekistan.' Located in Central Asia and spread over an area of 172,700 square miles, it is the 56th largest country in the world by area and the 42nd by population. It is bordered with Kazakhstan to the north, Kyrgyzstan to the northeast, Tajikistan to the southeast, Afghanistan to the south and Turkmenistan to the southwest. Tashkent (pronounced 'Tashqand' in Arabic) is the capital and its largest city. The second largest city is Samarqand, and other cities include Namangan, Andijan, Bukhara, Qarshi and Termez (Tirmidh). Interestingly, along with Liechtenstein, it is one of the world's only two double-landlocked countries (i.e. requiring the crossing of at least two national borders to reach a coastline).

Islam is the dominant religion in Uzbekistan, with approximately 90% of its population Muslim, about 7% Russian Orthodox Christians and the remainder atheist or non-believers in any faith. In terms of ethnic groups, the majority are Uzbek, about 15% Tajik and a small minority of Kazakh and Russian communities. The official language of the country is Uzbek, which is one of the Turkic languages. Prior to the 1920s, it was written using the Nasta'liq script. In 1926 CE, the Latin alphabet was introduced and the language went through sev-

eral revisions throughout the 1930s. In 1940, the Cyrillic alphabet was introduced by Soviet authorities and was used until the fall of the Soviet Union. Thus, since 1992, the Uzbek language has officially been written in Latin script. The Russian language is the second most spoken language, especially in the cities, including much day-to-day social, technical, scientific, governmental and business use. The Tajik language, which is a variety of Persian, is widespread in the cities of Bukhara and Samarqand because of their relatively large population of ethnic Tajiks.

Transoxiana/Mā Warā' al-Nahr

Uzbekistan is part of the wider region known in classical Arabic sources as *mā warā' al-nahr* ('that which lies beyond the river'). 'The river' is a reference to River Jayhun—nowadays called the 'Amu Darya' or 'Amu River' and historically known by its Latin name 'Oxus.' The area beyond (*mā warā'*) this river is known as Transoxiana—referring to the portion of Central Asia corresponding approximately with modern day Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and southwest Kazakhstan. For the Muslim Arabs residing in places like al-Hijaz, Damascus, Baghdad, Basra and Kufa, this region was typically 'beyond the [Oxus] river,' and they would refer to the great scholars of this region as the '*ulamā' mā warā' al-nahr*' (the scholars of the land beyond the river). Transoxiana classically comprised many provinces such as Sugd or Sugdiana (which included cities such as Bukhara, Samarqand and Nasaf), Khuwarizm, Saganiyan, Fergana and Shash; and along with the aforementioned River Oxus (*Jayhan/Amu*), the other major river is Jaxartes (called *Sayhūn* in Arabic sources and Syr Darya today).

The first recorded settlers in Central Asia were Turks, as well as Eastern Iranian nomads/Persians who arrived from the northern grasslands in the first millennium BC. These nomads, who spoke Iranian dialects, settled in Central Asia and began to build an extensive irrigation system along the rivers of the region. At this time, cities such as Bukhara and Samarqand began to appear as centres of government

and culture. The dominant religion in the region amongst the Iranians/Persians was Zoroastrianism but Buddhism and idol-worship also attracted followers—especially, amongst the Turks. A minority, who fled from the Roman Empire due to persecution, were followers of Nestorian Christianity. (Mahmud Khattab, *Qādat al-Fath al-Islāmī fī Bilād mā Warā' al-Nahr* and other sources)

The area was incorporated into the Iranian Achaemenid Empire. Alexander the Great conquered the region in 328 BC, bringing it briefly under the control of his Macedonian Empire. It was reclaimed by the Iranian Parthian Empire and later ruled by the Sasanian Empire, until the Arab Muslim conquest.

Muslim Conquest of Central Asia

The Muslim conquest of parts of Central Asia began as early as the second half of the first century AH. They had conquered and reconquered Khurasan—considered a gateway to Central Asian lands/Transoxiana—during the reigns of Sayyidunā 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb and Sayyidunā 'Uthmān (may Allah be pleased with them both) under the leadership of Al-Aḥnaf ibn Qays (may Allah be pleased with him), who even crossed the River Oxus (*Jayhūn*) for peace talks and reached Khuwarizm but was unable to conquer it.

Thereafter, during the reign of Sayyidunā Mu'āwiya in the year 48 AH (668 CE), Ḥakam ibn 'Amr al-Ghifārī (may Allah be pleased with them both) crossed the River Oxus and conquered the province of Saganiyan in Transoxiana. It is reported that he was the first person to drink water from the river, perform ablution from it and offer two *raka'āt* of thanksgiving (*shukr*) prayer. Later, Mu'āwiya (may Allah be pleased with him) appointed 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyād as the governor of Khurasan, and in the year 54 AH he crossed the Oxus and reached the mountains of Bukhara, Beykand and other parts. However, the female head (*Amīra*) of Bukhara sought reconciliation (*ṣulḥ*) with the Muslim army in return for a heavy ransom, which they accepted but the scene was set for a conquest at a later stage. In the year 56 AH,

Sayyiduna Mu'āwiya appointed Sa'īd—the son of Sayyidunā 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān (may Allah be pleased with them both)—as the governor of Khurasan. He, along with his army, which included the Companion Qutham ibn 'Abbās (may Allah be please with him), crossed the river and conquered Samarqand and other areas. Qutham ibn 'Abbās is said to have been martyred in the battle of Samarqand. Later, during the reign of the Umayyad Caliph 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān in the year 80 AH, Al-Muhallab ibn Abī Šufra al-Azadī engaged in many operations in Transoxiana, crossing the river with an army of 8,000 men and conquering parts of it. He was followed by his son Yazīd ibn al-Muhallab and his brother Mufaḍḍal ibn Abī Šufra with subsequent conquests.

However, most of the above engagements were not decisive and/or wide-ranging; some areas were taken back (with some being reconquered), and there was a peace settlement on other lands. Many attacks were mere raids, and some attempts to conquer territory across the river failed.

As such, the real conquest (*fath*) of Transoxiana/Central Asia occurred at the hands of the great Arab commander of the Umayyad Caliphate, Abū Ḥafṣ Qutayba ibn Muslim al-Bāhili (may Allah have mercy on him)—a governor of Khurasan who distinguished himself in the conquest of Transoxiana during the reign of Al-Walīd ibn 'Abd al-Malik. A capable soldier and administrator, he consolidated Muslim rule in the area and expanded the Caliphate's border to include most of Transoxiana. He consolidated Muslim control over the native principalities of Tokharistan and conquered the principality of Bukhara, and later completed the conquest of areas such as Khuwarizm, Sogdiana, Nasaf, Sijistan, Samarqand, Fergana Valley and Shash until he reached the borders of China. As such, the Umayyads were successful in conquering Central Asian lands/Transoxiana and bringing Islam to its residents.

After the Umayyads, the Abbasids gave Transoxiana more concrete control, development, and helped it to flourish economically. During the height of their Caliphate in the second and third centuries, Central

Asia experienced a truly golden age. Bukhara became one of the leading centres of learning, culture and art in the Muslim world—its magnificence rivalling that of other centres, such as Baghdad, Cairo and Cordoba. (See: *Qādat al-Fath al-Islāmī* by Mahmud Khattab and *Bilād Ma Wara' al-Nahr fī l-'Aṣr al-'Abbāsī* by Mahmud Khallaf)

The Mongol Invasion

In the seventh century AH (early thirteenth century CE), the Mongols, under Genghis Khan, invaded and conquered Central Asia. The local Khuwarizmian dynasty, and Central Asia as a whole, was decimated by the Mongol invasion. The armies of Genghis Khan inflicted large-scale damage on cities such as Bukhara and on regions such as Khuwarizm, brutally murdering hundreds of thousands of people on their way. As the leading province of a wealthy state, Khuwarizm was treated especially severely. Many Persian-speaking populations were forced to flee southwards in order to avoid persecution.

The Timurid Dynasty

Following the death of Genghis Khan, his empire was divided among his four sons and family members, and later the empire began to break up, and thus various tribal groups competed for influence. A particular tribal chieftain, Taymur/Timur Lang (a Muslim), emerged from these struggles and became the dominant force and ruler. He, in fourteenth century CE, established the Timurid dynasty and was proclaimed the Supreme Emir in and around modern day Iran and Central Asia with his capital in Samarqand. Born in the city of Shahrīsabz (in modern day Uzbekistan), he led military campaigns across Western, Southern and Central Asia, the Caucasus and southern Russia. He emerged as the most powerful ruler in the Muslim world after defeating the Mamluks of Egypt and Syria, the emerging Ottoman Empire and the declining Delhi Sultanate. From these conquests, he founded the Timurid Empire.

The empire fragmented shortly after Timur's death and the state

began to split. Uzbek tribes began conquering Central Asian lands in the sixteenth century CE and, subsequently, the region was split into three states: Khanate of Khiva, Khanate of Kokand and Emirate of Bukhara. The latter included all of modern day Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and other regions.

The Russian Empire

In the mid-nineteenth century, around 1860 CE, the Russian Empire, attracted to the region's commercial potential and, especially, its cotton, began a full military conquest of Central Asia. The Emirate of Bukhara combatted Russian attacks for a period, but finally, around 1870 CE, all three khanates (hence all of present day Uzbekistan) were incorporated into the Russian Empire—with Tashkent becoming the political centre of Russian Turkestan.

The Communist Revolution and the Creation of the Soviet Union

In 1917 CE, the communist Russian revolution took place, which led to the creation of the Soviet Union, and it subsequently began taking control of the region. Ibrahim Bek of Bukhara led an organized Muslim resistance against the Soviet military, but the Soviets eventually managed to capture the whole region and take it under its control. It declared Uzbekistan as one of its fifteen Soviet Socialist Republics and thus the 'Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic' was created and became part of the Soviet Union—officially, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).

Like in other Muslim majority Republics, such as Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, the oppression against Muslims was ongoing from the time of the Russian Empire, but it reached new heights under the communist Soviet regime. Mosques and madrasas were shut, offering prayers was outlawed, the Qur'an and other religious literature was banned, non-state-sanctioned religious leaders and congregations were outlawed and Muslims were punished for simple acts of wor-

ship such as praying and fasting. Those who tried resisting had to face brutal consequences and death. For approximately 74 years, Muslims in Central Asia underwent intense trials and suffering. However, they—especially the scholars (*ulamā'*)—offered unique sacrifices in order to preserve their faith (*īmān*) in even such testing times. They would offer prayers and teach each other how to pray, in secrecy. After midnight, when Soviet military personnel would retire to bed, these Muslims would commence their Islamic study circles in underground bunkers which would end before daybreak. As a result, despite being under severe oppression for 74 years, they managed to preserve their faith (*īmān*); and when the Soviet rule came to an end, many of them emerged from within as pure and sincere believers. (See: Mufti Taqi Usmani's *Safar dar Safar* p. 273)

Independence

Following the breakup of the Soviet Union, Uzbekistan declared independence as the 'Republic of Uzbekistan' on 31 August 1991 with Islam Karimov appointed as the country's first President. The situation for Muslims indeed improved in comparison to the Soviet period. However, restrictions still remained throughout the presidency of Karimov. Following the death of Islam Karimov in 2016, Shavkat Mirziyoyev was elected as President of Uzbekistan. The new President is much more open to religious and other freedoms, *Al-ḥamdu lillāh*. Thus, some of the religious restrictions imposed by the previous administration have been lifted. Some religious institutes (*madāris*) have opened, and it seems there is an increased inclination among the masses in returning to the *Dīn*. However, observers say, more remains to be done by the government in terms of granting complete religious freedom to the people.

With the above brief historical background to Uzbekistan and the region, let us now proceed to a detailed account of our trip to Uzbekistan.

The Trip

SATURDAY 13th APRIL

Departure

Me and my dear friend, Brother Yahya Batha (director of Turath Publishing), boarded an early morning Aeroflot (a Russian airline) flight on Saturday 13th April (2019) from London Heathrow to Moscow. Although there are direct flights from the UK to the Uzbek capital, Tashkent, we needed to visit the city of Bukhara first. Thus, we took a flight to Moscow and then to Bukhara. As we were landing at Sirmatov airport in Moscow, I could see beautiful lakes that had turned into ice—and it was the month of April! (Incidentally, UK citizens require a visa to enter Russia. Therefore, if you have a connecting flight from another airport—Moscow has four airports—ensure to obtain a visa first). After spending most of the day at the airport (having lunch and performing our *Zuhr*, *Asr*, *Maghrib* and *Ishā* prayers), our plane took off for Bukhara at 10:30pm local time.

SUNDAY 14th APRIL (DAY ONE)

After a journey of approximately three and a half hours from Moscow, we landed in Bukhara airport at 4:30 am on Sunday morning. Looking out of the window, I realized the city wasn't very big or lit up—in

contrast to landing at other big cities. Bukhara airport is very small in comparison to other airports and, when we landed, I could only see our plane on the runway and no other plane landing or taking off was in sight. We walked from the plane to the airport terminal and, within a few minutes, we were out. A few brothers representing the Dār al-Hilāl organization—the official host of Shaykh Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani—received us at the airport (Dār al-Hilāl had been informed of our visit and, thus, they left no leaf unturned in looking after us during our stay. May Allah reward them abundantly, *Āmīn*). The organisation was founded by a well-known Uzbek scholar—Shaykh Muhammad al-Ṣādiq ibn Muḥammad Yūsuf (who passed away in 2015, may Allah have mercy on him)—and is engaged in publishing copies of the Noble Qur'an and books in Uzbek and Russian languages, among other *da'wa* activities (more details regarding Dār al-Hilāl and its founder shall be mentioned later, *in shā Allah*).

It was my first experience of meeting Uzbek Muslims and, *subhān Allah*, it was love at first sight. From the point of meeting these brothers at the airport till our departure from Uzbekistan, we only met people with amazing character (*akhlāq*), sincerity, gentleness, compassion and a love for Islam and Muslims. One of the brothers from those who received us at the airport was Muhammad Ayyub, whose ancestral background is from Bukhara, i.e. an original Bukhari. He had just returned from India, where he had spent some time at the prestigious Dār al-ʿUlūm in Deoband and spoke Arabic fluently.

Our hosts took us from the airport to the old part of Bukhara, where they had booked us into a pleasant, clean and traditional style Al-Salam hotel. The hotel is run by a family, and you can feel this from the moment you enter. The rooms are comfortable and in the centre is a lovely courtyard. We offered our *Fajr* prayers, ate breakfast and sat with the brothers discussing various issues relating to sacred knowledge and Islam. My friend, brother Yahya, and I were very tired after a long journey. Hence, after breakfast, we resorted to much needed sleep.

The City of Bukhara

Prior to *Zuhr*, we decided to take a stroll outside our hotel and see the old part of Bukhara in the company of a couple of our host brothers. Bukhara will forever be remembered for, and associated with the name of, Imam Bukhari (may Allah have mercy on him), who was born and raised in this city, acquired his early education here and spent time here during his later life. It seems he has singlehandedly placed this historical and ancient city onto the world map.

Bukhara is an ancient city which was once a prominent stop on the Silk Road trade route between the East and the West. Located in the principality of 'Sugd,' the city was known in earlier times as 'Bumijkat.' According to Encyclopaedia Iranica, the name 'Bukhara' is possibly derived from the Sogdian 'Buxārak' (place of good fortune), and Muhammad ibn Ja'far Narshakhī, in his *History of Bukhara*, mentions that the city was also known as 'Madinat al-Ṣufriya' (the copper city) and 'Madinat al-Tujjār' (the city of merchants), but the name Bukhara was more popular than all the other names. Since the middle ages, the city has been known as Bukhara. The modern Uzbek spelling is Buxoro. That is how you will see it written today in Uzbekistan.

Bukhara was conquered by Qutayba ibn Sa'īd al-Bāhili (mentioned previously) around the year 90 AH (some say 94 AH). The city was classically known for its beauty, tall buildings and magnificent gardens, such that it was commonly said, "there is no Muslim city more beautiful than Bukhara; one of the recreational places on earth." It had seven doors including the main gate/entrance to the city. The city became a major centre of Islamic learning and culture during the middle ages, and—along with Imam Bukhari (may Allah have mercy on him)—many other great personalities hailed from this city, such as the hadith scholar Ḥāfiẓ 'Abd al-Rahīm Abū Zakariyyā al-Tamīmī al-Bukharī (died. 461 AH), the famous physician Abū 'Alī Sīnā' (died. 428 AH), the Hanafi jurist Imam Abu Ḥafṣ al-Kabīr (died. 217 AH), the saint Bahā al-Din Naqshband and many others. (See: *Mu'jam*

al-Buldān, Qādat al-Fath al-Islāmī and Bilād Mā Warā' al-Nahr fī 'l-ʿAṣr al-Abbāsī)

Today the city looks beautiful, clean and contains many well-preserved and historical mosques, madrasas, bazars and caravanserais. The Uzbekistan government put in a restoration programme to renovate many of the historical sights after they had been severely damaged or demolished during the Soviet period. Along with the Uzbek language, many people here can speak Tajik and Persian. The people are very friendly, and many attend the five daily prayers at the mosques, *Al-Ḥamdu lillāh*.

Lyabi Hauz and Kokaldosh Madrasa

As we walked out of our Al-Salam hotel, we saw a beautiful and clean water stream/canal directly in front of us. Such streams were used for supplying water to the residents of the city in earlier times. As mentioned earlier, we were in the old part of Bukhara and, thus, within a few minutes of walking we arrived at a big pool surrounded by beautiful historical buildings—a magnificent architectural ensemble created during the 16th and 17th centuries CE. The historic pool—known locally as 'Lyabi Hauz' (meaning by the pool/*hawḍ*)—was a source of water supply in olden times and is one of the few remaining pools that have survived in the city of Bukhara. Many tourists come to visit the area and there are some traditional restaurants next to it. The area becomes very busy in the evenings with tourists and locals, but, as we were touring during the day, it was fairly quiet.

The beautiful buildings—mostly with blue tiles and careful artwork on the exterior—surrounding the pool on three sides consist of the Kokaldosh Madrasa and two lodging houses. The madrasa, on the north side of the pond, was established around 1568 CE and was the largest in the city with over 300 rooms. It was still functioning up until the Soviet occupation. Built in the late 1560s, its construction was overseen by the general and statesman, Kulbaba Kokaldosh, who

sponsored many civic projects during the rule of 'Abdullah Khan II. During the Soviet period, the madrasa was used for a variety of purposes, including a hotel. The Kokaldosh Madrasa has now been restored to its original condition, if not its original function. We entered the beautiful building and admired the curved ceilings, colourful tile work and the beautiful calligraphy, including Qur'anic verses inscribed on the walls. The central courtyard was encircled with very small rooms, which once served as student dormitories. The board on top of one such room read, "The living conditions of students in the Madrasas of Bukhara xvi-xx century." Some of these rooms are souvenir shops today and, in fact, most such historical places sadly now only serve as tourist attractions.

The other structures that stand on the west and east sides of the pool respectively include a lodging house, known as *Khanqah* in those days, where seekers and students would stay, when they visited the city, and secondly the Nadir Divan Beghi Madrasa—both built by Nadir Divan-Beghi. These structures also have a blue-tiled exterior and beautiful artwork.

Meeting Mufti Shabbir Ahmad (UK)

After the short stroll, we returned to our hotel and offered *Zuhr* prayers at a nearby Mosque. At lunch, we met one of my teachers of hadith and *fiqh*, Shaykh Mufti Shabbir Ahmad of the UK (may Allah protect him), who, along with his wife and son (Shaykh Yusuf), also decided to join the visit to Uzbekistan and, thereby, be in the company of Shaykh al-Islam Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him). Mufti Shabbir Ahmad is a former teacher of hadith and other sciences at Dār al-'Ulūm in Bury (UK) and currently a teacher of hadith at the Dār al-'Ulūm in Blackburn. *Al-Ḥamdu lillāh*, I studied the complete *Sunan al-Tirmidhī* under him during the mid-nineties, as well as undergoing *iftā'* training. As such, his company was another highlight of this amazing trip, *Al-Ḥamdu lillāh*.

al-Buldān, Qādat al-Fath al-Islāmī and Bilād Mā Warā' al-Nahr fi l-ʿAṣr al-Abbāsī)

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The beautiful buildings—mostly with blue tiles and careful artwork on the exterior—surrounding the pool on three sides consist of the Kokaldosh Madrasa and two lodging houses. The madrasa, on the north side of the pond, was established around 1568 CE and was the largest in the city with over 300 rooms. It was still functioning up until the Soviet occupation. Built in the late 1560s, its construction was overseen by the general and statesman, Kulbaba Kokaldosh, who

sponsored many civic projects during the rule of ‘Abdullah Khan II. During the Soviet period, the madrasa was used for a variety of purposes, including a hotel. The Kokaldosh Madrasa has now been restored to its original condition, if not its original function. We entered the beautiful building and admired the curved ceilings, colourful tile work and the beautiful calligraphy, including Qur’anic verses inscribed on the walls. The central courtyard was encircled with very small rooms, which once served as student dormitories. The board on top of one such room read, “The living conditions of students in the Madrasas of Bukhara XVI-XX century.” Some of these rooms are souvenir shops today and, in fact, most such historical places sadly now only serve as tourist attractions.

The other structures that stand on the west and east sides of the pool respectively include a lodging house, known as *Khanqah* in those days, where seekers and students would stay, when they visited the city, and secondly the Nadir Divan Beghi Madrasa—both built by Nadir Divan-Beghi. These structures also have a blue-tiled exterior and beautiful artwork.

Meeting Mufti Shabbir Ahmad (UK)

After the short stroll, we returned to our hotel and offered *Zuhr* prayers at a nearby Mosque. At lunch, we met one of my teachers of hadith and *fiqh*, Shaykh Mufti Shabbir Ahmad of the UK (may Allah protect him), who, along with his wife and son (Shaykh Yusuf), also decided to join the visit to Uzbekistan and, thereby, be in the company of Shaykh al-Islam Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him). Mufti Shabbir Ahmad is a former teacher of hadith and other sciences at Dār al-‘Ulūm in Bury (UK) and currently a teacher of hadith at the Dār al-‘Ulūm in Blackburn. *Al-Hamdu lillāh*, I studied the complete *Sunan al-Tirmidhī* under him during the mid-nineties, as well as undergoing *iftā’* training. As such, his company was another highlight of this amazing trip, *Al-Hamdu lillāh*.

The Silk Route and the Magok-i-Attari Mosque

After lunch, brother Yahya, the family of Mufti Shabbir Ahmad and I decided to take another stroll outside our hotel. Along with the above-mentioned Lyabi Hauz and Kokaldosh Madrasa, we walked through what was the great Silk Route bazars in olden times. The Silk Route was a historic trade route that dated from the second century BC to the 14th century CE and stretched from Asia to the Mediterranean, traversing China, India, Persia, Arabia, Greece and Italy. It was dubbed the Silk Route because of the heavy silk trade that took place during that period. Bukhara has long been a commercial city and served as an important trading centre along the Great Silk Road. In fact, it lay on a crossroads of ancient trade routes and, thus, we arrived at a location which the locals described as the central point of the Silk Road. There were four doors; each door was the exit point for each of the four directions. The surrounding domed and multi-arched covered bazaars remain important shopping centres today and serve as reminders of ancient trade.

We also visited the historic Magok-i-Attari Mosque, notable for being one of the oldest surviving mosques in Central Asia and one of the few surviving buildings in Bukhara from the period before the Mongolian invasion. It is speculated to have been built in the 9th to 10th-century CE on the remains of a Zoroastrian temple. Sadly, the mosque today has become a carpet museum.

Whilst strolling, we were somewhat embarrassed to find many locals—especially the youth—coming to greet us and insisting on having their pictures taken with us. They did not know us nor where we came from, yet they expressed remarkable respect and love just by seeing our external attire and, in fact, made us feel like ‘celebrities.’ I inferred from this that deep inside they had immense love for Islam and the people of the *Dīn*, and when they saw someone whom they felt was connected to the *Dīn*, they felt overwhelmed with emotion. May Allah accept this love and make it a means of goodness for them in this life and the next, *Āmīn*.

Just before returning to our hotel, we unexpectedly met another group on a tour of Uzbekistan. The group included Shaykh Ibrahim Bham (a renowned scholar of South Africa, whom I know well from previous meetings), Shaykh Yahya Adel Ibrahim (a well-known imam from Australia, whom I had not met previously, but we both knew of each other) and Mufti Ziyad Patel (also of Australia, whom I had not known hitherto). Shaykh Yahya has been leading group tours to Uzbekistan for the last couple of years and has a wonderful series on YouTube covering his previous tours. I would definitely recommend watching them. It was my first time meeting him, and as soon as he saw me, he recognized me and greeted me with a beaming smile. A wonderful brother—may Allah accept his efforts. I also found Mufti Ziyad to be very balanced and sincere, and he appears to be doing great work in Australia. May Allah accept his efforts as well. Shaykh Ibrahim Bham is a very renowned senior scholar, who requires no introduction. May Allah protect him, *Āmīn*.

We reached our Al-Salam hotel and sat in the beautiful courtyard with Shaykh Mufti Shabbir Ahmad, drinking tea and discussing various issues, and awaiting the arrival of someone I was yearning to see from the moment I stepped foot outside my house for this journey!

Arrival of Shaykh al-Islam Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani

Finally, the time had come for the arrival of my beloved teacher and mentor, Shaykh al-Islam Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him and grant him *‘āfiya*), to Bukhara. The respected Shaykh arrived at Bukhara airport at 5:30pm local time from Moscow (where he had been for a few days upon the invitation of a leading university to deliver lectures on Islamic finance). He was accompanied by his wife, eldest son, Dr. Mawlānā Imran Ashraf Usmani (with whom I was already acquainted) and grandson, Abdullah Usmani (currently studying at Jāmi‘ah Dār al-‘Ulūm in Karachi). They were received at the airport by members of the host organization, Dār al-Hilāl, and their associates, notably: brother Rahmatullah al-Khuwarizmi

(son-in-law of the late founder of Dār al-Hilāl, Shaykh Muhammad al-Sadiq; a lovely brother who always had a smile on his face), Shaykh Hikmatullah (who graduated from Jāmi'ah Dār al-'Ulūm Karachi in 2004 and is well-respected in Uzbekistan with many students and even grand students), Shaykh Hasan (Imam of Masjid Sirāj al-Ṣāliḥ), Mufti Abdul Mannan (who studied at Dār al-'Ulūm, Deoband, India) and Shaykh Fadil Kayumov (a graduate of Ma'had al-Faṭḥ al-Islāmī in Damascus, and currently an editor and member of the management committee at Dār al-Hilāl; he supervised and managed this entire trip with ultimate diligence and professionalism *mā shā Allah*). They all received our respected Shaykh with extreme warmth and love.

The Muslims of Uzbekistan—especially scholars and students of knowledge—had been yearning for his visit to Uzbekistan for a long time. From the moment they received him at the airport until his departure, the love, respect, reception and welcoming he received was a sight to behold. The Shaykh was soon out of the small Bukhara airport and on his way to the Al-Salam hotel. We (the brothers from the UK) had remained in the hotel in anticipation of his arrival.

Our respected Shaykh arrived at the hotel shortly before *Maghrib* prayers. My heart had been yearning to see him all day—especially, as it had only been a few weeks since the failed assassination attempt on him in Pakistan (which I have written about previously). At last, the wait was over, as my eyes fell on the face of our beloved Shaykh in the hotel courtyard. It was an absolute delight and joy to greet him. I embraced him and gave him a long hug whilst I kept repeating the words "*Al-Ḥamdu lillāh*." He seemed in great health and spirits, and it was difficult to imagine that he had experienced such a traumatic ordeal only recently. I also met our dear Dr. Mawlānā Imran Ashraf Usmani, and it was also a delight to meet Abdullah Usmani (Shaykh's grandson) with whom I have been in communication for a while, but never met. Upon meeting him, I found him to be more than what I expected, *mā shā Allah*. Despite being young, I found him to be

courteous, gentle and blessed with good qualities. May Allah accept him for the work of His *Dīn*, *Āmīn*.

Tour of Old Bukhara City with Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani

After *Maghrib* prayers, our hosts had arranged a quick tour of the old part of Bukhara for Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani and his family (may Allah protect them), and we were also fortunate to join them. As such, a large group (consisting of many local brothers associated with the host organization, and the UK guests) walked whilst the respected Shaykh and his family were driven in a yellow rickshaw. The hosts had appointed a tour guide who—whilst walking beside the rickshaw—provided a running commentary in Arabic and Urdu on the various sites we were passing by. These included some of the ones I have already mentioned above (when mentioning our stroll before the Shaykh's arrival), such as the Lyabi Hauz ensemble, Nadir Divan Beghi Madrasa, the Silk Route Bazaars and the Magok-i-Attari Mosque. The guide also mentioned that there is a synagogue here and that a small community of Jews still resides here.

Kalan Mosque and Minaret

Our final destination was the famous Poi Kalan complex wherein lies (1) the famous Kalan Mosque, (2) the great minaret that is located besides it (Kalan means 'Grand' in Persian/Tajik, hence the 'Grand Mosque' and the 'Great Minaret'), and (3) the Mir Arab Madrasa (I shall discuss the madrasa later, as we made a special visit to it the following day). The Kalan complex brings about mixed emotions in a person, given the two contrasting chapters in its history.

The complex in which we were standing was what would have been ancient Bukhara and the area wherein Imam Bukhari (may Allah have mercy upon him) would have been raised and attained his early education. When Muslims entered Bukhara towards the end of the first Islamic century, a mosque was erected as the main mosque (*al-masjid al-jāmi'*) and this would have been the largest area where

people gathered for worship and study. Over a century later, the Great (*kalan*) Mosque became the place where Imam Bukhari (may Allah have mercy upon him) taught hadith for many years, and it is reported that around 20,000 students would attend his lessons at once. Indeed, the Mosque was reconstructed a number of times (hence, one may find different dates for its first construction), and it is not possible to say that the location of the prayer hall today is precisely where Imam Bukhari (may Allah have mercy upon him) taught. During the Soviet era, it was converted to a warehouse and remained in a devastated condition. Restoration work started in the 1970s—particularly, after the independence of the country in the wake of the collapse of the U.S.S.R.—and a little excessive restoration and reconstruction has been executed, giving it an almost brand-new look, similar to other historical buildings in the country.

Nevertheless, the whole area is significant in that it was once hustling and bustling with students of hadith and the great master himself teaching hadith. For this reason, when we entered the mosque for *'Ishā'* prayers, Shaykh al-Islam Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him) said, "I can smell and feel the fragrance of knowledge (*ilm*) and purity in the air; I can picture the time of Imam Bukhari and the scenes of Imam Bukhari and other great scholars and students engaged in the teaching and learning of hadith." He repeated this sentiment throughout the trip at various locations. *Al-Hamdu lillāh*, we entered the beautiful blue-tiled dome mosque and offered our *'Ishā'* prayer, making our own congregation (as far as I understand, the five daily prayers are not offered here), after which our respected Shaykh made *du'ā'*.

Next to the Kalan Mosque stands the beautiful, tall minaret in the form of a vertical pillar—illuminated and shining in the night sky. It was originally built by the ruler Muhammad Arsalan Khan in 1127 CE/520 AH (i.e. around 900 years old) for *Adhān* to be called for the five daily prayers. The minaret/pillar is made from baked brick, narrowing upwards, with a beautiful exterior design. In times of war, it was used

as a watch tower to look out for enemies. It was also known as the "Tower of Death", because for centuries, criminals were executed by being thrown from the top. We walked and marvelled at this historic work of art, and I could not help but realize the following verse of the Qur'an beatifically inscribed on its exterior: "*If Allah brings some harm to you, there is none to remove it except Him. And if He intends to bring some good to you, there is none to turn His grace back. . .*" (10:107).

Later, at dinner, I mentioned about the verse being inscribed on the minaret/tower to our respected Shaykh (may Allah protect him), and he responded by saying that he has been remembering this verse a lot during this entire trip! This was in relation to the failed assassination attempt on him, given it was his first journey abroad after the incident. He recited this verse repeatedly in various lectures and interviews after the incident, in that the enemies planned to harm him but if "Allah intends to bring some good to you, there is none to turn His grace back."

As mentioned, there are two contrasting chapters to the history of this area. Hence, along with the above-mentioned positivity, this is also a place of brutality and murder. In Mongolia, there was the rise of Genghis Khan, who was expanding his empire rapidly. However, it did not take long before he attacked and invaded the central Asian cities, wiping out everyone and everything that stood in his way. He marched into Bukhara, riding on his horse and came into this very mosque at prayer time. The imam and all those engaged in worship were brutally killed and their bodies were dumped into a well. This well is marked with a dome and can be seen today. He had tens of thousands of people killed and ordered for every building to be demolished. He only spared the great minaret, seeing that it could be used as a defence mechanism against any returning enemy.

The verse quoted earlier once again comes to mind in relation to this incident, in that "*if Allah brings some harm to you, there is none to remove it except Him.*" It is reported that this verse was inscribed at a much earlier stage by the architect—long before Genghis Khan

invaded Bukhara. The architect feared that the Emir might have him killed because the minaret kept falling, so he inscribed this verse, in that only Allah can protect me. However, the powerful verse became a sign and reminder for those who came later, and unto this very day, May Allah allow us to fully absorb the message of this verse, *Āmin*.

It is also worth remembering that despite the fact that the Mongols invaded and exterminated this entire region, and destroyed this very mosque, their own descendants later came to worship in the same mosque. The lesson for us to take is that there is always light after darkness, and that the light of believers worshipping Allah came after the darkness of Genghis Khan and his brutality.

With these thoughts on my mind, we departed the Kalan Mosque ensemble to return to our hotel. Hundreds of students and local well-wishers were encircled around our dear Shaykh and walking with him, everyone wanting to greet him and have a second or two with him, until he reached his car. The Shaykh and his family departed in a car, and we were escorted in a rickshaw through old Bukhara until we reached our hotel.

Evening Dinner

After reaching the hotel, we had dinner in the company of Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him). The Shaykh was very relaxed, jovial and cheerful. Among the issues discussed over dinner was the work and efforts of the—previously-mentioned—Shaykh Muhammad al-Sadiq of Uzbekistan (may Allah have mercy on him). Our respected Shaykh had met him on a few occasions at *fiqh* conferences and other gatherings, and he highlighted the great work carried out by the late Shaykh in recent times in Uzbekistan.

He also described the plight of Muslims in Russia, from where he had arrived. He mentioned that he had visited Moscow many years ago and witnessed a remarkable difference within the Muslims. Mosques are now fuller with the faithful and generally there is an increase in Muslims returning to their Dīn. He talked about the great Mosque

recently built in central Moscow, where he had led *Jumu'a* prayers in a congregation of approximately 15,000 attendees. The Shaykh also stated that he had visited Uzbekistan in 1992 with a group of scholars to highlight the Qadiyani issue (he was unable to write memoirs of this trip, as mentioned in his book *Safar dar Safar*).

He thereafter went on to discuss the great scholars of hadith and *fiqh* who lived in these areas—especially Imam Bukhari (may Allah have mercy on him). He stated that it is as though Allah Most High created the great Imam for the special purpose of preserving the Sunna. Despite not being of Arabic descent, even the Arabs accept him as an imam and testify to his greatness—even though Arabs do not easily acknowledge non-Arab superiority! He then went on to mention the various areas from where the great *muḥaddithūn*—such as the authors of the six main books of hadith—hailed and where they are buried. Many are buried in current day Iran, such as Imam Muslim in Nishapur, Imam Ibn Mājah in Qazwin and Imam Abū Dawūd in Sijistan (he has visited Nishapur but not Sijistan). He said, Nishapur has great Islamic history too, but, unfortunately, most historical sites in Iran have not been preserved. The graves of most scholars are not known except that of Ḥāfiẓ Shīrāzī (the great Persian poet and Sufi, died. 791 AH) and Shaykh Farīd al-Dīn al-ʿAṭṭār (may Allah have mercy upon them both). He remarked that the spirituality he felt at the grave of Shaykh al-ʿAṭṭār was unique, which he has rarely experienced at other graves. He mentioned that there are still many Sunni Muslims in Iran—especially, in Baluchistan and Zahidan, and that he was once invited to the Dār al-ʿUlūm in Zahidan. There was also a mention of the author of the famous Hanafi *fiqh* work, '*Al-Hidāya*', who was also from Uzbekistan. The Shaykh mentioned how students generally have a natural love and connection with him, and this writer added that he really challenges the student with his often complex style of juristic argument.

After dinner and the priceless time spent in the company of our beloved Shaykh, we all retired to our rooms for much needed rest.

I briefly nipped into his room to give him a small gift which I had brought with me from the UK, and he reciprocated with his usual affection, compassion and *du'ā'*. With this, our first day in Uzbekistan came to an end.

MONDAY 15th APRIL (DAY TWO)

Monday started with *Fajr* prayers and then breakfast at the hotel cafeteria in the company of our dear Shaykh Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him). Once again, various casual discussions took place, such as the current situation of the *jamā'ah tabligh*. He also mentioned how the graves of scholars and saints here in Uzbekistan do not contain the various type of innovations (*bid'āt*) seen in other countries (such as kissing and circumambulation of graves, tying knots to them and—in some cases—prostrating to them).

Visiting Graves

After breakfast, we headed back to our rooms and got ready for the day's tour ahead, much of which included visiting the graves of great scholars and saints. As such, it is appropriate to briefly mention the ruling on visiting graves, before continuing with the details of the trip.

Visiting graves in general is not only permitted, but a Prophetic Sunna and means of reward. Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him) said, "I used to forbid you from visiting graves. Do now visit them. . ." (*Saḥīḥ Muslim*), and "Visit graves, for, it reminds one of his death" (*Muslim*). 'Āi'sha (may Allah be pleased with her) relates that Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him) would go to the *Baqī'* graveyard in the last portion of the night and say: "May peace be on you, O abode of the believing people! What you have been promised has come to you. You are tarried till tomorrow, and certainly we shall follow you, if Allah wills. O Allah! Forgive the inmates of the *Baqī'-al-Gharqad*" (*Saḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 974).

There are many reasons and benefits in visiting graves. For example:

(a) acting upon the Prophetic recommendation and Sunna, (b) it being a means of remembering death, the hereafter and the mortal reality of this life, and (c) benefitting the inhabitant of the grave by way of making *du'ā'* for them and reciting Qur'an. One may also intend—especially, when visiting graves of the righteous—benefitting from the blessings (*baraka*) granted by Allah to the grave of the deceased. Imam Sufyān ibn 'Uyayna is reported to have said, "Allah's mercy descends when the righteous are mentioned" (*Kitāb al-Zuhd* of Imam Ahmad). As such, if the mere mention of the righteous brings about the mercy of Allah, then their actual presence in life or the place where they are buried would also, hopefully, result in Allah's mercy. In other words, one intends to attain the blessings and mercy of Allah which He grants at the grave of a pious individual due to his righteousness and that Allah will accept one's *du'ā'*—and nothing more. However, those without proper knowledge and understanding are discouraged from intending this, since they may not be able to distinguish between right and wrong and eventually fall into blameworthy acts and beliefs.

As for travelling long distances to visit a grave, it seems permitted in principle. Our Shaykh Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him) mentioned on a few occasions that the famous hadith which states that "No journey is to be undertaken, except to [visit] three mosques [. . .]" refers only to travelling to another 'mosque' with the intention and thought of gaining more reward by praying there. Travelling to other places is permitted. Otherwise, no form of travel would be permitted, which is absurd. Often, people visit a particular city/country for reasons such as visiting local Muslims or with the intention of *da'wa*, and then visit the graves of those buried there.

Finally, many graves of scholars and saints have now been converted to solid structures with domes etc. This is not permitted in Shari'a. At some graves, innovations and impermissible practices may also take place. However, visiting such graves does not become unlawful due to this, as long as one is aware of the rules of Shari'a and is confident of not engaging in any practices of *shirk* or *bid'a*,

as outlined by Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani in his Urdu *Fatāwā Usmānī* (1:102–103).

Shaykh ‘Abd al-Khāliq al-Gijdiwānī

To continue with the details of our trip, our first destination in the morning was the grave/tomb of a famous Naqshbandi sufi and saint called Khawāja (master) ‘Abd al-Khāliq al-Gijdiwānī (may Allah have mercy on him). We headed in our convoy of cars from our hotel in Bukhara to the town of Gijdiwān (spelt locally as ‘Gijduvon’). The town is approximately 40 kilometres from Bukhara. Therefore, the drive in heavy rain took us around one hour.

Shaykh Khawāja ‘Abd al-Khāliq al-Gijdiwānī was born and raised in this town of Gijdiwān and was from the descendants of Imam Mālik (may Allah have mercy on him). He acquired his early education in Bukhara and later became one of the leading shaykhs of the Naqshbandi sufi order, after staying in the company of his teacher and shaykh—Khawāja Yūsuf al-Hamdānī (may Allah have mercy on him). It is related that he was the first shaykh in the Naqshbandi order to employ silent *dhikr* (*al-dhikr al-khafīyy*). He wrote a book titled *Al-Waṣīyya fī Adab al-Ṭarīqa* (Counselling the Etiquettes of the Spiritual Path). He passed away to the mercy of Allah on 12 Rabi‘ al-Awwal 575 AH in his hometown of Gijdiwān, where now a large memorial complex has been built by the Uzbek government. (*Rashahāt ‘Ayn al-Hayāt fī Manāqib Mashāyikh al-Ṭarīqa al-Naqshbandiyya* by Al-Kāshifi)

Whilst walking towards the grave, our respected Shaykh remarked that Shaykh ‘Abd al-Khāliq al-Gijdiwānī was some ten generations above the famous Naqshbandi master, Shaykh Bahā al-Dīn Naqshband, in their spiritual order. He also mentioned that their *taṣawwuf* order (*ṭarīq*) leads to the Companion, Salmān al-Farīsī (may Allah be pleased with him), and that Mujaddid al-Alf al-Thānī, Shaykh Aḥmad Sarhindī of India (d. 1034 AH) is also part of their order. We offered *salām* at Shaykh ‘Abd al-Khāliq al-Gijdiwānī’s grave and recited *al-Fātiḥa* and other portions from the Qur’an.

The state-appointed head of religious affairs and imams in Bukhara, Shaykh Jabir Khan, had also arrived here to welcome Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani. Thus, there was a short dialogue between the two, before we departed. Shaykh Jabir mentioned that for seventy years under Soviet occupation, Muslims suffered a lot in terms of religious freedom, but now, after independence, many mosques and madrasas have been opened. He said that the Uzbek President also visited this memorial site and that they are planning to initiate a madrasa here. Our respected Shaykh remarked that the air of these lands is filled with the pure scent of great scholars, *muhaddithūn*, *mufasssirūn*, *fuqahā* and *ṣūfiyya*. He also mentioned the sacrifice of scholars during communism and the oppressive Soviet regime, in that it was due to their love for Islam and unyielding resolve to preserve their own faith (*imān*) and the faith of their people. Due to their strong faith, they emerged as believers after seventy years of occupation.

Shaykh Khawāja Bahā al-Dīn Naqshband

Our next port of call was the resting place and tomb of probably the most famous Naqshbandi sufi saint, Khawāja Bahā al-Dīn Naqshband al-Bukhārī—a sufi master, recognized as the founder of the Naqshbandi spiritual order (*ṭarīq*). He was born on 14 Muharram 718 AH in the village of Qaṣr al-‘Ārifān near Bukhara city. He learnt from, and stayed in the company of, his shaykhs—Muhammad Bābā al-Samāsī and Sayyid Amīr Kalal. It is reported that he preferred silent *dhikr*, both individually and in groups. He was renowned for his renunciation of the world (*zuhd*) and excessive worship (*ibāda*). His various teachings and statements have been recorded in many languages, and he passed away in the same village of Qaṣr al-‘Ārifān in 791 AH. A tomb and large memorial complex have been built at the site of his grave.

We offered our *salām* and recited *al-Fātiḥa* at the grave of Shaykh Bahā al-Dīn Naqshband located in the large memorial complex. Our respected Shaykh Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect

him) mentioned that when he last visited in 1992, a tomb was not built over his grave. As we were returning from the grave site, I asked our respected Shaykh what he normally recites when visiting graves. He replied, "I recite *Surats al-Fātiḥa*, *al-Ikhlāṣ* and *al-Mulk*. If there is more time, then I also recite *Surat Yāsīn*." I also noticed throughout our journey that when he had completed his recitation at a graveside and was about to leave, he would say "*Assalāmu 'alaykum*" audibly. I never got the opportunity to ask him the reasoning and intention behind this.

Hadith Lesson at the Institute of advanced Islamic studies

Adjacent to the tomb of Shaykh Bahā al-Dīn Naqshband is the institute of advanced Islamic learning (*Al-Maḥad al-Ālī*), which, in fact, is the advanced branch of the Mir Arab Madrasa, which we visited later, located in old town Bukhara. As such, after reciting at the grave, we made our way to the impressive lecture hall of the institute. Approximately 100 students and some teachers were already waiting in the hall. The session started with one of the students reading the whole chain (*isnād*) of our Shaykh Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him) to Imam Tirmidhī (may Allah have mercy on him) in very good Arabic, which contained the names of some of the great scholars of the Indian subcontinent, such as Shaykh al-Islam Mawlānā Husayn Aḥmad Madanī, Shaykh al-Hind Mawlānā Maḥmūd al-Ḥasan and Shaykh Mawlānā Qāsim Nanotawī (may Allah have mercy on all of them). I noted how the student uttered the words 'Our Master' (*sayyidunā*) and 'Master of Scholars' (*sayyid al-ʿulama*) before the name of Shaykh Nanotawī. The chain also contained the Dehlawi scholars, such as Shah ʿAbd al-Ghanī and Shah Walī Allah (may Allah have mercy on both of them). Thereafter, he recited the hadith from the chapter on the *Virtues of Sham and Yemen* in Imam Tirmidhī's (may Allah have mercy on him) *Sunan*, along with the chain mentioned before the hadith.

Thereafter, our dear Shaykh delivered a thought-provoking lecture,

in which he stated that he felt honoured to be at the institute of learning that is adjacent to the grave of Shaykh Bahā al-Dīn Naqshband (may Allah have mercy on him), and that the students are privileged to be studying here. He said, "I have been informed that students have completed *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, which is a great blessing, *Al-Ḥamdu lillāh*. However, we must remember that knowledge itself is not sufficient. My father, Mufti Muhammad Shafi' (may Allah have mercy on him), would say, "If knowledge itself was sufficient, then Shaytan would have been the greatest scholar (*ʿālim*). However, knowledge did not benefit him." As such, the main purpose of *ʿilm* is to obey Allah and his Messenger, and Imam Tirmidhī's work is actually a guide on how to live one's life in accordance with the Sunna, due to the wide-ranging hadiths in various chapters, such as worship and good character."

He went on to mention the importance of following the Sunna in every aspect of one's life and abandoning innovation (*bidʿa*). He said, "Here lies the grave of Shaykh Bahā al-Dīn Naqshband, whose mission in life was to practice the Sunna and counter innovation. The objective of all the various sufi shuyukh, such as Mujaddid al-Alf al-Thani, and of all the four chains (*salāsīl*) was one: to follow the Sunna, although their respective routes may differ." Finally, the Shaykh granted the students and teachers permission (*ijāza*) to relate hadith from him.

The gathering ended with the teachers placing a special Uzbek turban on our Shaykh's head, putting a cloak on him and a pair of shoes. It seems like this is their local custom of honouring very special guests and *shuyūkh*. At each location, throughout our trip, the Shaykh was gifted a unique cloak/coat and turban/hat. It made me wonder how he would take all these cloaks and turbans back with him to Pakistan! This was their love for him, but sometimes love must also be accompanied by wisdom. One should consider what gift is best suited and convenient for the recipient in their current circumstance. Nevertheless, the sight of turbans and cloaks being placed on our beloved Shaykh was a sight to behold, *Al-Ḥamdu lillāh*.

Imam Abū Ḥaḥṣ al-Kabīr and his son Abū Ḥaḥṣ al-Ṣaghīr

We next visited the complex wherein lie the graves of Imam Abū Ḥaḥṣ al-Kabīr and his son (may Allah have mercy on both of them), and the Jāmi' Mosque adjacent to it.

Imam Aḥmad ibn Ḥaḥṣ Abū Ḥaḥṣ al-Kabīr al-Bukhari (the father) was born in the year 150 AH (the same year in which Imam Abū Ḥanīfa passed away) in the city of Bukhara and passed away here in 217 AH. He was a scholar of hadith (*muḥaddith*) and jurist (*faqīh*) of the Hanafi School. His teachers include Imam Muhammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Shaybānī and *Shams al-A'imma* al-Ḥalwānī (may Allah have mercy on both of them). He is called Abū Ḥaḥṣ 'al-Kabīr' in relation to his son who is known as Abū Ḥaḥṣ 'al-Ṣaghīr'—i.e. senior (al-Kabīr) and junior (al-Ṣaghīr). The great scholar of hadith narrator criticism and accreditation (*al-jarḥ wa 'l-ta'dīl*) and biographer, Imam Dhahabī (may Allah have mercy on him) describes him as the "Shaykh of Transoxiana" and "Jurist of the East." Imam Dhahabī also narrates a hadith with his own chain that includes Abū Ḥaḥṣ al-Kabīr on the authority of Sayyidunā 'Alī (may Allah be pleased with him) to Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him), and confirms that Abū Ḥaḥṣ al-Kabīr passed away in Bukhara during Muharram in the year 217 AH (*Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā*). Mufti Muhammad Taqī Usmani mentions in his *In'ām al-Bārī* (1:78) that Imam Bukhari studied briefly under Abū Ḥaḥṣ al-Kabīr and, thus, the latter is amongst Imam Bukhari's teachers. He further adds that the two had good relations and respected each other, and that the incident mentioned in some books regarding Abū Ḥaḥṣ al-Kabīr warning Imam Bukhari against issuing fatwa in Bukhara, and Imam Bukhari's subsequent expulsion from Bukhara, is unsubstantiated. Imam 'Abd al-Ḥayy al-Laknawī in his *Al-Fawā'id al-Bahiyya* mentions the same.

Next to his grave is the grave of his son, Imam Abū 'Abdillāh Muhammad (incidentally, a number of imams have the kunya 'Abū 'Abdillāh' and name 'Muhammad' at the same time, including Imam Bukhari, Imam Shāfi'ī and Imam Muhammad ibn al-Ḥasan) ibn

Aḥmad ibn Ḥaḥṣ al-Bukhārī—known as Abū Ḥaḥṣ al-Ṣaghīr. Imam Dhahabī describes him as the "Mufti of Bukhara", "from the imams of Islam and the Sunna" and "the Shaykh of the Hanafis." Imam Laknawī quotes Ibn Mandah as saying that Abū Ḥaḥṣ al-Ṣaghīr passed away in the year 264 AH.

There were two further graves—one of the son of Imam Abū Ḥaḥṣ al-Ṣaghīr, and the other I am unable to recall. Nevertheless, we stood before the graves of these illustrious imams of knowledge and piety and recited some Qur'an. May Allah accept their efforts—and indeed the efforts of all our scholars—and grant them His pleasure, *Āmīn*.

We then performed *wuḍū'* and offered *Zuḥr* prayers at the adjacent mosque. Thereafter, we returned to our cars to head back to our hotel.

Shams al-A'imma al-Ḥalwānī

After lunch at the hotel, afternoon rest and *Asr*, we once again departed in our convoy of cars for the old part of Bukhara. Historically, the city of Bukhara had many gates (some say, about twelve). Our cars entered via one such old looking door, which our driver described as the 'Samarqand' gate.

We first headed to the resting place of one of the great Hanafi jurists, *Shams al-A'imma* al-Ḥalwānī. *Shams al-A'imma* literally means: 'the sun amongst the imams.' It was a title of respect and honour used by Hanafis in and around Transoxiana (*mā warā' al-nahr*) for scholars who stood out from others due to their brilliance and vast knowledge. A few scholars have been given this title, such as Imam Sarakhsī (the author of the thirty-volume masterpiece, *Al-Mabsūṭ*, the majority of which he wrote while incarcerated in a well), Imam Abu 'l-Faḍl al-Zaranjarī al-Bukhārī (described as Abū Ḥanīfa al-Aṣghar, d. 512 AH), Imam Kardarī and the imam under discussion—Al-Ḥalwānī. *Shams al-A'imma* 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥalwānī was a leading Hanafi jurist and the teacher of the other *Shams al-A'imma* al-Sarakhsī. Ḥalwānī is also pronounced 'Ḥalwā'ī' and is a reference to his ancestral trade in sweets. He was considered an imam of his time of the Hanafi

Madhhab in Bukhara. He passed away in 448 AH and was laid to rest in Bukhara (*Al-Jawāhir al-Muḍiyya*). He is reported to have said, "I have acquired this knowledge ('ilm) due to respect and veneration for it. For, I have never handled a paper [containing 'ilm] except in a state of purity." (*Ta'lim al-Muta'allim Tariq al-Ta'allum*) It is worth noting that whenever the title *Shams al-A'imma* is used independently (*muṭlaqan*) in classical Hanafi works, it refers to the other *Shams al-A'imma*—i.e. al-Sarakhsī, and when used for anyone else, the full name is normally mentioned.

It was an honour to be able to offer our *salām* and recite at the grave of this great imam (may Allah have mercy on him). As we were leaving, our respected Shaykh (may Allah protect him) said that the other *Shams al-A'imma* (al-Sarakhsī) was also from Bukhara and spent his earlier life here. He then travelled to Uzjand (Uzgen), in current day Kyrgyzstan, and passed away there. The Shaykh has visited Kyrgyzstan and Imam Sarakhsī's grave in Uzjand in 2009, details of which are mentioned in his Urdu travelogue.

Birthplace of Imam 'Bukhari

Our next destination was the area of Bukhara where the great Imam Bukhari (may Allah have mercy on him) was born and raised as a child. The emotions and feelings, when approaching this location, are unexplainable, as my mind went back to the end of the second century, imagining the young Muhammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī as a child in old Bukhara. Our hosts took us to a pit and said that it was the birthplace of the great imam. The large pit is like an empty pond/water reservoir. We were informed that the pit is where Imam Bukhari's house was located, but it was later made into a pit so that no one is able to walk over or desecrate the place of his birth. There were only a few minutes left before the *Adhān* of *Maghrib* and we were stood in front of this pit listening to our Shaykh repeating what our hosts had mentioned about the pit. Shaykh Mufti Shabbir Ahmad (of the UK) requested Shaykh al-Islam if his son Shaykh Yusuf could read

a hadith here, to which Shaykh al-Islam agreed. As such, we were all blessed with listening to a hadith from Imam Bukhari's '*Saḥīḥ*' at the location of his birth, *Al-Ḥamdu lillāh*.

We then made our way quickly on foot to the nearby Khoja (Khawāja) Zayn al-Din Mosque. The architectural design of this mosque is unique, and our hosts suggested that soil from Imam Bukhari's birthplace was used in the construction of this mosque. We performed our *Maghrib* prayers here.

Mir Arab Madrasa and Advice to Students

It was mentioned previously that we visited the Poi Kalan complex wherein lies the famous Kalan Mosque and Minaret, and the Mir Arab Madrasa. However, we had only visited the mosque and minaret, and tonight was our visit of the madrasa. (Here I met my dear friend, Shaykh Abdur-Rahman ibn Yusuf Mangera who joined us late, due to flight complications, and also Mawlānā Asmar of Scotland. We also had Mawlānā Faruq Pandor of Manchester and his son in our UK group).

The beautifully designed Mir Arab Madrasa building, with a blue-tile exterior and two beautiful blue domes, towers above the surrounding buildings in the centre of Bukhara. Construction of the madrasa dates back to 16th century CE and is credited to Shaykh 'Abdullāh al-Yamānī (who came from Yemen)—hence, the name 'Mir Arab' i.e. the Arabian Ameer—who was the spiritual guide of the Sheybanids. His grave is located near the Madrasa. It is suggested that, after the Soviet communist regime had shut down all mosques and madrasas, it allowed the reopening of the Mir Arab Madrasa in 1946, but under heavy influence and control of the regime. Today, the madrasa is operating, *Al-Ḥamdu lillāh*, with a curriculum of intermediate (*mutawassīṭa*) Islamic studies.

We first visited the grave of Shaykh 'Abdullāh al-Yamānī and then made our way to the prayer hall of the madrasa, where a large group of students and teachers were waiting for the arrival of our respected Shaykh al-Islam (may Allah protect him). The respected Shaykh then

gave a short *naṣiḥa* in Arabic, which he commenced by reciting the ‘*ḥadīth musalsal bi ‘l-awwaliyya*’ (this is a *ḥadīth*, which is traditionally taught as the first by each teacher in a continuous chain) and granting all those present permission (*ijāza*) to relate *ḥadīth* from him. He then went onto explaining the *ḥadīth*—also known as *ḥadīth al-rahma* (the *ḥadīth* of mercy)—saying that one should have mercy and compassion towards all of Allah’s creation. He said, “It is significant that the *ḥadīth* which teachers have traditionally taught as the first, is the *ḥadīth* of mercy (*rahma*), which indicates that the first message for any student is developing a merciful nature. Allah’s Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him) said, “Have mercy upon those who are on the earth; He Who is in the heavens shall have mercy on you” (*Abū Dawūd*), which indicates that one should be merciful towards all of Allah’s creation, including non-Muslims. The nature of this “mercy”, however, varies from person to person. Thus, mercy towards non-Muslims entails a desire in the heart for them to be saved from eternal punishment in the Hereafter.”

A short question and answer session followed the lecture, with questions on a range of topics, such as the marriage contract and the method of achieving enjoyment whilst reciting the Qur’an. The respected Shaykh said that achieving “enjoyment” (*ḥalāwa*) whilst reciting the Qur’an should not be the objective. As such, if one experiences enjoyment, then great; and if not, then it should not discourage one from continuing to recite the book of Allah. In response to a question regarding Imam Tirmidhī’s (may Allah have mercy on him) usage of the phrase “the people of Kufa say”, he explained that it is not specifically aimed at Imam Abū Ḥanīfa (may Allah have mercy on him), but, rather, a group of Kufan scholars.

A student asked regarding the Shari’a ruling in relation to seeking blessings through the righteous (*tabarruk*). The Shaykh responded by saying, “Two extreme tendencies are found within people concerning *tabarruk*. Some consider it a form of *shirk*. This is incorrect. *Tabarruk* is established through numerous *ḥadīths* and *āthār*, such as the report in *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* that Sayyidunā ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Umar (may Allah

be pleased with him) practiced *tabarruk* through praying at the prayer spot of Allah’s Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him), while travelling between Mecca and Medina. Furthermore, the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) distributed his hair amongst the Companions. As such, *tabarruk* is not *shirk*.

However, relying totally on *tabarruk*—without performing good deeds and, rather, committing sins—is of no benefit. This was also taught by Allah’s Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him). He enshrouded the hypocrite, ‘Abdullāh ibn Ubayy, in his blessed garment upon the latter’s death and blew his blessed saliva on him, yet it did not benefit him. I feel—and only Allah knows best—that Allah’s Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him) did this deliberately, knowing too well that Ibn Ubayy was a hypocrite, to show that such acts of *tabarruk* are of no benefit, if one is engaged in sinful acts.”

We then performed our ‘*Ishā*’ at the Mir Arab Madrasa and returned to our hotel. After dinner, we all retired to our rooms for much needed sleep, *Al-Ḥamdu lillāh*.

TUESDAY 16th APRIL (DAY THREE)

We had an early start on Tuesday, as we took the very early morning train from Bukhara to Samarqand. The train was scheduled to depart at 5 am. As such, our whole group (comprising UK guests and local hosts) left the hotel at approximately 4 am and arrived at the fairly modern train station. The *Fajr* prayer was performed at the station, *Al-Ḥamdu lillāh*. On the train, we also had another group travelling to Samarqand, which included Shaykh Ibrahim Bham of South Africa and Mufti Ziyad Patel of Australia. Therefore, it was an enjoyable and fruitful journey. After approximately two hours of travelling, we arrived in the historical city of Samarqand. We were received at the rail station by the state appointed *Qādī* of Samarqand, amongst others, and taken to our hotel—a modern hotel called Regestan Plaza, in the centre of the city.

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The City of Samarqand

Samarqand is one of the oldest, continuously inhabited cities of Central Asia and, alongside Bukhara, has always been a major city of this region—historically located in the principality of Sugd. Whilst Bukhara was a centre of learning and culture, Samarqand enjoyed the status of being the political and business capital of Sugd. Later, it too became a hub of learning and scholars. Different theories have been presented behind the name of the city. Some say that it was given this name by a previous ruler called ‘Samar’, who named it after his name and added ‘Qand’, which means ‘town’ or ‘market’. Others say the name is derived from the Sanskrit word ‘Samariya’, which means a place of gathering and meeting. Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him) suggested that it could be derived from the Arabic word ‘Samar/Thamar’, which means fruit—hence, ‘the city of fruits’.

The Companion, Sa‘īd ibn ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān (may Allah be pleased with him), entered this city around the year 55 AH and, later, it was conquered by Qutayba ibn Sa‘īd al-Bāhili (mentioned previously) in 87 AH and reconquered in 92 AH. Samarqand was known for its greenery and beautiful landscape such that when Qutayba ibn Muslim entered the city, he said, “This city is like a green sky, the buildings resemble shining stars, and the rivers akin to galaxies.” Many historians praised the city, giving it preference over other cities, due to its greenery, trees, gardens and rivers. It was also a major centre of trade in Transoxiana—especially, silk trade, and people could come to trade in its bazars from all neighbouring regions.

During the golden Islamic period, the city housed some of the greatest scholars in our history, such as the great Hanafi jurist (*faqih*), Abu ‘l-Layth al-Samarqandī (died. 393 AH), the renowned imam of Islamic theology, Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (died. 333 AH), the author of the famous text of Islamic creed, *Al-Aqā’id al-Nasafiyya*, Imam Nasafi (who passed away in Samarqand in 537 AH)—may Allah have mercy on them all. Imam Nasafi actually wrote a large book covering the biographies of Samarqandi scholars, titled *Al-Qand fi Dhikr ‘Ulamā*

Samarqand. The city was the capital of the empire of Taymur/Timur Lang, and his tomb is in the city. (*Mu‘jam al-Buldan*, *Qādat al-Fath al-Islāmī* and *Bilād Mā Warā’ al-Nahr fi ‘l-‘Asr al-Abbāsī*)

Modern day Samarqand is vibrant, and it is the second largest city of Uzbekistan. After the Soviet communist rule, when many buildings were destroyed, a restoration plan was put in place. The city currently is divided into two parts: the old city, and the new city which developed during the days of the Russian Empire and Soviet Union. The old city includes historical monuments, shops and old private houses, while the new city includes administrative buildings along with cultural centres and educational institutions.

Upon reaching our hotel, we had breakfast in the company of the Qāḍī and others. Thereafter, we freshened up for a long day of touring ahead.

Grave of Imam Bukhari

Emotions were running high as we departed our hotel for the resting place of arguably the greatest hadith scholar of our *Umma*, *Amīr al-Mu‘minīn fi ‘l-Ḥadīth*, Imam Abū ‘Abdillāh Muhammad ibn Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī (may Allah be pleased with him). What else can be said about this great imam other than the fact that his name and compilation of hadith is mentioned alongside the book of Allah? As Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him) regularly says, “It is as though Allah Almighty created him for the purpose of compiling hadith.”

Although Imam Bukhari (may Allah have mercy on him) was born and raised in Bukhara, he did not pass away here. After travelling to different parts of the world, he relocated during his latter life to his hometown of Bukhara. Whilst residing in Bukhara, he endured hostility and hardship, which, eventually, led him to leave his hometown. The governor of Bukhara, Khālīd al-Dhuhālī, requested Imam Bukhari to come to his mansion and lecture privately to his children, but the Imam refused on the grounds that it goes against the honour

and dignity of sacred knowledge. Instead, the governor's children ought to come and attend his lessons, which are open to everyone. The *Amīr* then suggested that Imam Bukhari should allocate a special time just for him and his children, but Imam Bukhari (may Allah be pleased with him) refused that too, saying that it would mean he would have to refuse and deprive the general public from seeking knowledge at that time. Imam Bukhari said that the only way I can do this is if you issue a decree that I cannot teach. This way, I shall have an excuse before Allah Most High. Imam Bukhari felt that the *Amīr* felt too proud in having his children sit with the general public and seek knowledge. As a result, *Amīr* Khālid al-Dhuhālī became upset and conspired against the great Imam, making false allegations and rousing the people against him. Finally, he decreed for the Imam to be expelled from Bukhara.

When the residents of Samarqand learned that Imam Bukhari had been exiled from Bukhara, they requested him to come to their city. Thus, Imam Bukhari departed for Samarqand. Whilst on his way to Samarqand, the people of Samarqand had a disagreement about whether he should be allowed to come there—some wanting him to come, whilst others opposed the idea, based on the allegations levelled at him by Khālid al-Dhuhālī. Imam Bukhari (may Allah have mercy on him) learnt of the commotion before entering Samarqand and, thus, decided not to go there. Instead, he decided to reside at the house of his relatives in the village of Khartank, just outside Samarqand. It is also reported that at that time he made a supplication saying, "O Allah, the earth has become constricted for me, despite its vastness. So, call me to You" (making a supplication for death is permitted, when one fears for his religion and anticipates trials/*fitna*). Soon after, he became ill in Khartank, but then the people of Samarqand reconsidered and agreed to allow him to move there. Imam Bukhari's (may Allah have mercy on him) health improved and he decided to travel once again to Samarqand. As he was about to depart and sat on his means of transportation, the call from Allah arrived. Thus, he passed away in

Khartank in the year 256 AH at the age of 62 and was buried there. May Allah elevate his rank, reward him and grant him a high abode in the Hereafter, *Āmīn*. (*In'ām al-Bārī*, 1/85–87)

We departed from our hotel for Khartank, which is approximately 30 km from Samarqand city, and arrived at a well-constructed large complex consisting of many buildings. After parking our cars, we walked straight to the building where the grave of Imam Bukhari is located. A staircase led us down to a room in which his grave lies wrapped in a green cloth. It was indeed a surreal experience standing before the grave of arguably the greatest hadith Scholar (*muḥaddith*) ever, in the company of one of the greatest living scholars. I stood by the grave reciting *Al-Fātiḥa* and other portions of the Qur'an, with my mind filled with thoughts of this great Imam, his sacrifices and achievements. Everyone was very emotional with teary eyes, including our beloved Shaykh. I have never seen him this emotional before. I admit I have not been in his company too often, but from what I have witnessed over the years, this probably was one of his most emotional states in the presence of others. His voice was subdued and his eyes were shedding tears. In such a state, he recited the first hadith of Imam Bukhari's *Ṣaḥīḥ* by the grave. Thereafter my colleague, Shaykh Yusuf Shabbir, recited the final hadith. We all then turned towards the *qibla* to supplicate before Allah Almighty.

Imam Bukhari Research Centre

Within the large memorial complex is the newly-constructed research centre (*Markaz li 'l-Buḥūth al-ʿilmī al-Islāmī*). We walked from the grave to the centre. On display were some old copies and manuscripts of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* from different centuries, and a map showing the route that Imam Bukhari (may Allah have mercy on him) took during his travels to different parts of the world in pursuit of knowledge. A YouTube presentation in Arabic concludes that he had travelled a total of 14,000 km, all of which he did on foot or mounted on an animal!

One of my colleagues, Mawlānā Shu'ayb Shah, after some research,

concluded that Imam Bukhari travelled 12,160 km, as per the following breakdown: Bukhara to Balkh (Afghanistan) 537 km, Balkh to Merv (Turkmenistan) 747 km, Merv to Naysabur (Iran) 493 km, Naysabur to Rayy (Iran) 755 km, Rayy to Wasit 871 km, Wasit to Basra 435 km, Basra to Kufa 445 km, Kufa to Baghdad 172 km, Baghdad to Madina 1,424 km, Madina to Makkah 450 km, Makkah to Jeddah 89 km, Jeddah to Aydhāb (western port coast of Red Sea—located in the halā'ib triangle) 375 km, Aydhāb to Fustat (near Cairo) 945 km, Fustat to Asqalān 729 km, Asqalan to Qaysariyya 110 km, Qaysariyya to Damascus 273 km, back to Baghdad 836 km and then to Bukhara 2,474 km. This amounts to 12,160 km.

In the lecture hall of the research centre, a program was arranged for teachers and students. Thus, we made our way there. The event commenced with Shaykh al-Islam Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him), Mufti Shabbir Ahmad (of the UK) and Shaykh al-Islam's son, Dr. Imran Ashraf Usmani, all reading selections from the *thulāthiyyāt* hadiths of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (hadiths with chains that have only three narrators between Imam Bukhari and the Prophet—peace and blessings be upon him). Thereafter, our respected Shaykh delivered a short speech in Arabic, the summary of which is as follows:

"The whole Muslim *Umma* is indebted to *Amīr al-Mu'minīn fi 'l-Ḥadīth*, Sayyidunā Imam Bukhari (may Allah have mercy on him), for compiling and preserving hadith, and for the accomplishment of which, he travelled 14,000 km from and to Bukhara. We are delighted to be visiting this pure land, from where guidance and light spread. All the scholars are in agreement that his book is the "most authentic book after the Book of Allah." This was not based on mere emotion. Rather, the scholars rigorously scrutinized his work and then came to this conclusion. This exemplifies the miracle of Islam, in that a man from Uzbekistan, who was a non-Arab and whose mother tongue was Persian, is acknowledged as the greatest imam of hadith by everyone, including the Arabs in whose language the Qur'an was revealed and hadiths were uttered.

Secondly, I would like to congratulate us all that this resting place (*maqām*) of Imam Bukhari deserved to be a centre of Islamic learning, and we were hoping for it to be one for a long time. We thank the President of this country, who established this centre out of love for *ilm* and the people of *ilm*. I pray to Allah Most High that it becomes a true centre of Islamic knowledge and that the city of Samarqand returns to its previous glory *inshā Allah*. I and my colleagues are privileged that we are one of the first people to be visiting this great centre, which was established only two months ago. This is a great favour of Allah upon us.

Finally, I would like to remind myself and the listeners that the reason behind Imam Bukhari's popularity and widespread acceptance was not merely his vast knowledge and great work; rather, it was also due to his God-consciousness (*taqwā*), turning to Allah, sincerity and his great sacrifices. Sometimes for months on end, he would not eat and only suffice on a walnut or two. He compiled his work in such a manner that, after scrutinizing everything and investigating the authenticity of hadiths, he did not rely on his research and study; rather, he would offer the prayer of guidance (*ṣalāt al-istikhāra*) before including each of the hadiths in his work. This means that he performed 14,000 *rak'āts* of prayer in total, given that there are approximately 7000 hadiths in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*! As such, acceptance comes only from Allah, when one turns to Him. How many other authors wrote books filled with knowledge, research and study, yet they did not receive the same acclaim? As such, we all need to take lesson from his life and try to inculcate within ourselves *taqwā* and turning to Allah. This should be our objective when studying the hadiths of Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him)."

After the speech, we toured the magnificent newly-built madrasa facilities—included within the complex. Officially known as Al-Ma'had al-Islāmi li 'Ulūm al-Ḥadīth al-Nabawī, the institute is situated in a state-of-the-art building comprising classrooms, dormitories, a canteen and a swimming pool. It was pleasing to see such a well-built

and sophisticated infrastructure for the study of sacred knowledge in a country like Uzbekistan. Thereafter, we walked back to our cars and departed from the Imam Bukhari grave complex and headed for our next destination.

Ulugh Beg Observatory

Our next port-of-call was the Ulugh Beg Observatory, located in Samarqand. Built in the 1420s CE by the Timurid astronomer, Ulugh Beg, it is considered to have been one of the finest observatories in the Islamic world. Ulugh Beg was a Timurid Sultan, as well as an astronomer and mathematician who passed away in the year 853 AH. He was notable for his work in astronomy-related mathematics, such as trigonometry and spherical geometry, as well as his general interests in the arts and intellectual activities. During his rule, the Timurid Empire achieved its cultural peak through Ulugh Beg's attention and patronage. He also built a madrasa in Samarqand, and then began building the observatory to support the astronomical study at the madrasa.

Whilst standing before the underground remains of the meridian arch, rediscovered and excavated around 1908 CE, the local guide was explaining to us in Persian some of Ulugh Beg's methods and Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him) was translating for us, and often adding his own explanatory comments. He mentioned that Ulugh Beg was the first person who measured angles in the sky, discovered stars (*burūj*) and determined the inclination of the ecliptic to the equator, 400 years before Greenwich—i.e. his observatory is 400 years older than the Greenwich observatory. The finely constructed arch—the largest instrument of its type in 15th century CE—was used primarily for measuring the positions of stars and to determine midday.

He discovered one thousand and eighteen stars using this instrument. A trench of about 2 metres wide was dug in a hill along the line of the Meridian and in it was placed the arch of the instrument.

It was 11 meters long and had a radius of 40.4 meters, with a staircase on either side to provide access for the assistants who performed the measurements. Small holes were made in the various levels of the arch, and from there the astrolabe instrument was used to observe the sun, moon and other stars. An astrolabe (*al-Asturlāb*) is an elaborate inclinometer, historically used by astronomers and navigators to measure the altitude above the horizon of a celestial body, day or night. It can be used to identify stars or planets, to determine local latitude, to survey or to triangulate. Our respected Shaykh mentioned that it is an amazing instrument, and that they used it whilst studying astronomy with his teacher Shaykh Mufti Rashid Ahmad Ludhyanawi (may Allah have mercy on him). The instrument is stored at the Jāmi'ah Dār al-'Ulūm Karachi library.

Next to the remains of the discovered observatory is the Ulugh Beg Museum. It was built in 1970 to commemorate Ulugh Beg. The museum contains reproductions of Arabic manuscripts, Ulugh Beg's star charts, important European printed editions of Ulugh Beg's works, astrolabes and other instruments.

Imam Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī

Our next destination was the resting place of the great imam of Islamic creed and theology, Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (may Allah have mercy on him). Since my late teenage years, I have been hearing the name of this great imam and his works. As such, it was an absolute privilege to be able to visit his grave and recite *al-Fātiḥa*.

His full name is Abū Manṣūr Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Maḥmūd al-Muturīdī—Muturid being a locality in Samarqand. At around the third century AH, various sects with unorthodox beliefs began to emerge in Muslim lands, such as the Mu'tazila. Due to this, orthodox Sunni scholars felt the need to codify the science of *Aqīda* and thus uphold and defend the mainstream transmitted beliefs of the Qur'an and Sunna—as understood by the Companions (*ṣaḥāba*), their students (*tābi'ūn*), great hadith scholars (*muḥaddithūn*) and

jurists (*fuqahā*) over successive generations. In doing so, two major theological schools emerged—namely, the Ashʿarī School (attributed to the great theologian and Shāfiʿī jurist, Imam Abu ʿl-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Ismāʿīl al-Ashʿarī, who passed away in 324 AH) and the Māturīdī School (attributed to the imam under discussion, who passed away in the year 333 AH in Samarqand). Like Imam Ashʿarī, Imam Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī countered the Muʿtazila doctrine and defended orthodox Sunni Islam, but in the Transoxiana (*mā warāʾ al-nahr*) region. He authored a number of works, such as *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, *Awhām al-Muʿtazila* and *Al-Radd ala ʿl-Qarāmiṭa*.

It is worth noting that both imams—Abu ʿl-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī and Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī—were contemporaries and from the *salaf*, i.e. the first three generations of Muslims. Both lived predominantly in the third century AH and passed away in the fourth century AH—with Imam Maturīdī's demise coming slightly after that of Imam Ashʿarī. They did not introduce any new doctrine or set of beliefs. Rather, they merely reinforced—in a structured and codified manner—the mainstream beliefs of the Qurʾan and Sunna, as understood by mainstream scholars before them and in their time. The basic aim and objective of both imams was to preserve and defend orthodox beliefs against the onslaught of the various heretic sects—in particular, the Muʿtazila. Imam Ashʿarī grew up and resided in Basra—the headquarters of the Muʿtazila—and, therefore, encountered their ideology first-hand. At the same time, the tremors of the Muʿtazilī ideology reached Central Asia—where Imam Māturīdī lived—and so he took on the task to combat them in that part of the world. As such, although both imams lived in different parts of the world, they shared the same mission: standing in the face of the corrupted ideology of the Muʿtazilī (and other groups) and defending mainstream, orthodox Islam.

We stood before the grave of this great imam and recited portions of the Qurʾan and offered our *salām*. The *Qāḍī* of Samarqand, who had been accompanying us all day, explained that this whole area used to be a twenty-acre graveyard where hundreds of scholars are buried. The

condition for anyone to be buried in the graveyard was that they be a jurist and that their name be Muhammad. When Imam Bukhari (may Allah have mercy on him) passed away on the outskirts of Samarqand in Khartank, the scholars of his time had a discussion as to whether he should be buried in this graveyard. It was finally decided that he should be buried in the place where he passed away, given that it was in accordance with the Sunna and Imam Bukhari (may Allah have mercy on him) was the inheritor of Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him). The Soviets destroyed this graveyard and built houses over it, with the house of a Jewish family built over the grave of Imam Māturīdī (may Allah have mercy on him). The Uzbek authorities are trying to open it slowly and restore the full area as a graveyard, with three acres of land so far restored.

I asked the guide regarding the grave of the great imam in Hanafi *fiqh* and the author of the famous Hanafi masterpiece, *Al-Hidāya*. He responded by saying that there is no precisely known location for his grave, but it is mentioned in the books that the author of *Al-Hidāya*, Imam Marghīnānī (who passed away in Samarqand in the year 593 AH—may Allah have mercy on him), is buried only 28 feet away from Imam Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī. However, our Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him) commented that, when he visited in 1992, the grave of the author of *Al-Hidāya* was known.

The guide informed us that the grave of another great Hanafi jurist (*faqīh*) and ascetic (*zāhid*), Abū ʿl-Layth al-Samarqandī (died. 373 AH), is nearby at another location, but we were unable to visit it. Faqīh Abū ʿl-Layth authored many works, such as *Tanbīh al-Ghāfilīn*, *Bustān al-ʿĀrifīn* and *Kitāb al-Nawāzil*—may Allah have mercy on him.

As we were leaving the area, where—as mentioned—there was previously a cemetery wherein many great scholars and the pious (*awliyāʾ*) had been buried, our dear and respected Shaykh audibly uttered a general *salām* in accordance with the Sunna and made *duʿāʾ*, by saying, “*Assalāmu ʿalaykum Yā dār qawm muʾminīn, antum lanā salaf wa inna in shā Allah bikum lāhiqūn*” (Peace be upon the inhab-

itants of this abode from among the believers. You have gone ahead of us and we shall, God willing, join you). With thoughts of the great scholars and saints who lived in these lands and were buried here, we departed and headed back to our cars.

Shaykh Khawāja ‘Ubayd Allah Aḥrār

Our next destination was the resting place of the renowned Naqshbandī saint, Shaykh Khawāja ‘Ubayd Allah Aḥrār (may Allah have mercy on him). We first offered *Zuḥr* prayers in the mosque named after him. Thereafter, we visited the large graveyard in which the Shaykh is buried. Born in the current day Uzbek city of Tashkent, Shaykh ‘Ubayd Allah Aḥrār travelled to Samarqand to seek knowledge. He also visited Bukhara and stayed in the company of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Khāliq al-Gijdiwānī. He also travelled to Herat and learnt from Shaykh Qāsim al-Tabrīzī, and later stayed in the company of Shaykh Yā‘qūb Charkhī/Tasharkhī (may Allah have mercy on them all). He passed away in the year 895 AH in Samarqand.

As we were walking in the rain from our cars towards the mosque, our respected and dear Shaykh said that Shaykh ‘Ubayd Allah Aḥrār was a disciple—in the Naqshbandī order—of Shaykh Yā‘qūb Charkhī (died. 851 AH), who is buried in the Tajikistan city of Dushanbe. Furthermore, Shaykh ‘Ubayd Allah Aḥrār’s disciple was Shaykh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī, the famous Persian poet and sufi saint, who is also popularly known for his great Arabic commentary on the *Kaḥfiyyah* of Ibn al-Hajib al-Maliki, in Arabic grammar (may Allah have mercy on them all). Shaykh ‘Ubayd Allah Aḥrār’s main focus was the rectification (*iṣlāḥ wa tazkiya*) of those in power and the government, and in this regard he said, “If I became a shaykh, then no one else would have any disciples/students left, but Allah has given me another responsibility—and that is the implementation of the Shari‘a within the rulers.”

We stood before the grave of Shaykh ‘Ubayd Allah Aḥrār and the other graves in the large cemetery, reciting *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa* and other portions of the Qur’an. May Allah be pleased with all our great scholars

and pious men, and allow us to follow in their footsteps, *Āmīn*. We then returned to our hotel for lunch and thereafter rest.

Departure from the Hotel and Iṣlāḥī Khuṭubāt

After resting and performing *‘Asr* prayers at the hotel, our group once again departed from the hotel in multiple cars. As we were about to leave, a local Uzbek brother in the hotel lobby gifted Shaykh Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him) a book in the Uzbek language. It was the translation of the first volume of the Shaykh’s famous *Iṣlāḥī Khuṭubāt*—a collection of his Urdu discourses and lectures in over twenty volumes, of which some ten volumes have been translated to English under the title *Discourses on Islamic Way of Life*. Those who have studied the *Iṣlāḥī Khuṭubāt* know the value of the discourses therein, and, as such, it was very pleasing to see that work has started in translating it to Uzbek.

The Companion Sayyiduna Qutham ibn ‘Abbās

Our group left the hotel to visit the resting place (*maqām*) of the Companion and cousin of Allah’s Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him), Sayyidunā Qutham ibn ‘Abbās ibn ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib ibn Hāshim (may Allah be pleased with him). His mother’s name was Umm al-Faḍl Lubāba bint al-Ḥārith, and he was a foster brother of Sayyidunā Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī (may Allah be pleased with them both). It is mentioned in the narrations that he resembled the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) the most, and Ibn ‘Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) says that he was the last person to leave the Prophet’s (peace and blessings be upon him) grave after burial. Sayyidunā ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (may Allah be pleased with him) appointed him as governor of Makka, and some say governor of Madina. He had come to Khurasan and then Samarqand in the company and leadership of Sa‘īd ibn ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān (may Allah be pleased with them both) as a member of the army sent by Sayyidunā Mu‘āwiya (may Allah be pleased with him), and was martyred and buried in Samarqand. He

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did not narrate many hadiths and there are no hadiths narrated from him in the six major collections of hadith. (Dhahabī, *Siyar A'lam al-Nubalā'*)

As we walked towards the large complex—locally known as the Shah Zinda ensemble—we witnessed many other tombs and buildings of religious significance. The name 'Shah Zinda' means 'the living king' and is in reference to Qutham ibn 'Abbās' (may Allah be pleased with him) martyrdom, since a martyr is alive per the Qur'anic directive. The complex was formed over eight centuries ago and now includes more than twenty buildings, comprising three groups of structures: lower, middle and upper, connected by four-arched domed passages. Some graves leading up to the main building have facial images, and we were informed that they are from the Soviet era and the practice is no longer found in the Muslims.

We entered the room in which lies the grave of this great Companion and cousin of Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him) in the company of our respected Shaykh, and recited portions of the Qur'an and offered our *salām*. The Shaykh then mentioned a very important point. He said, "Sayyidunā Qutham came to Samarqand as a member of an army sent by Sayyidunā Mu'āwiya (may Allah be pleased with them both). This shows that Qutham ibn 'Abbās—who was from the family of the Prophet (*Ahl al-Bayt*)—had good relations with Sayyidunā Mu'āwiya, given that he joined the army sent by the latter. Likewise, Sayyidunā Mu'āwiya's connection with the *Ahl al-Bayt* was one of love and respect, given he sent Qutham ibn 'Abbās in his army. This points to the fact that relations between Sayyidunā Mu'āwiya and the *Ahl al-Bayt* were cordial and one of mutual love and respect."

After visiting the grave, we made our way to the nearby mosque to perform *Maghrib* prayers. Our respected Shaykh led the prayer and then delivered a speech in Arabic, which was translated to Uzbek. A summary of what he said is as follows:

"It is a great honour for these lands that the Companion Qutham

ibn 'Abbās (may Allah be pleased with him) migrated, travelling a long distance to come here, took part in *jihād* and was martyred; a Companion who resembled the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and was the last person to leave the Prophet's (peace and blessings be upon him) grave after burial. We also visited today the resting place of Imam Bukhari (may Allah have mercy on him)—an imam who is accepted by the whole *Umma* as the '*Amīr al-Mu'minīn fi'l-Hadīth*' and that his book is "the most authentic book after the Book of Allah." I was very pleased to see that an educational institute has been established next to the grave of Imam Bukhari. This is a great initiative taken by the President of the country, in trying to revive the scholastic heritage of this *Umma*, and we thank and congratulate him for this endeavour. We also thank and congratulate those who are part of this project.

Moreover, from among the glad tidings for the people of this land is that Shaykh Muhammad al-Ṣādiq (may Allah have mercy on him) was one of the great scholars of this part of the world. He strove in the path of Allah and spread the teachings of Islam with wisdom and good preaching, and authored over 100 books. In reality, he was the one in latter times who saved these lands from the darkness of oppression and communism. He played a big role in returning the Muslims to their religion. One of his great works and projects—which will always be remembered fondly—is the translation to the Uzbek language of nine hadith books (the six main books, *Sharḥ Ma'ānī al-Āthār* of Imam Ṭahāwī and Imam Mālik's *Al-Muwatta'* with both the narrations of Imam Muhammad and Yaḥyā ibn Yaḥyā al-Laythī). The project had commenced a while back, and I was asked to write a foreword for it, which I did, *Al-Ḥamdu lillāh*. The publication of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* has been completed in many volumes, consisting of the Arabic text of the hadiths, their translation and thereafter brief explanatory notes. Such works are important, because we are in need of learning the Sunna of Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him), who was sent as a teacher and guide for humanity. As such, if we wish to return to the

Din and make our lives fully in conformance with the Shari'a, then it is necessary that we learn the Qur'an and Sunna—the Sunna in reality being a commentary of the Qur'an."

The speech was translated to Uzbek and then we offered our *'Ishā'* prayers. Thereafter, we returned to our hotel, had dinner and retired to our rooms for much needed rest, *Al-Ḥamdu lillāh*.

WEDNESDAY APRIL 17 (DAY FOUR)

Departure for Tirmidh (Termez)

Today was another early morning start for us, as we bid farewell to the historic city of Samarqand and travelled some 375 kilometres to the city of Tirmidh (also spelt Termez) in the southernmost part of Uzbekistan, near the Afghanistan border—with a view to visiting the village and resting place of the great imam of hadith, Abū 'Isā al-Tirmidhī (may Allah have mercy on him). After breakfast at the hotel, we departed from Samarqand at around 8:30 am in a convoy of three or four vehicles. Shaykh al-Islam Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him) and his family were seated in one car (incidentally, he did not visit Tirmidh during his previous visit to Uzbekistan in 1992), and the rest of us in other vehicles. The drive to Tirmidh was long, some six or seven hours, but *Al-Ḥamdu lillāh* the weather was very pleasant and the scenery along the way enjoyable and gratifying. The company too was great, as the vehicle I was travelling in had my teacher, Shaykh Mufti Shabbir Ahmad, his son, Shaykh Yusuf, and my two dear friends, brother Yahya Batha of Turath publishing and Shaykh Abdur-Rahman ibn Yusuf Mangera. The various discussions throughout our long journey were interesting, to say the least! Our hosts decided to take the M39 highway, because two stops were arranged along that route; an alternative route includes travelling through the historic city of Qarshi.

The Town of Kitab

After approximately two hours, we arrived at a town called 'Kitab' ('Kitob' in Uzbek) in the Qashqadaryo region of Uzbekistan. During the Soviet period, a major astronomical observatory was built in Kitab to commemorate its medieval reputation as the 'town of astronomers.' Our hosts had arranged a brief visit to a madrasa/Islamic School here named 'Khawāja Bukhari Madrasa' ('Xoja Buxoriy' in Uzbek)—attributed to a saint who came from Bukhara to this area to spread knowledge.

As we entered the Madrasa building and climbed the stairs, I saw posters displayed on the walls comprising Qur'anic verses, hadiths and other religious texts. One such poster caught my eye, displaying an image of a colourful tree, based on the teachers, students and works of Imam Abū Ḥanifa (may Allah have mercy on him)—with the Arabic text of the hadith, "For whomsoever Allah intends good, He gives him an understanding of the religion" inscribed above. It is safe to say that the teachers and students were followers of the Hanafi School (as it is generally the case in Uzbekistan), and given we had just visited the city of one *muḥaddith* (Imam Bukhari) and were travelling to the city of another *muḥaddith* (Imam Tirmidhī), it reiterated the fact that the narration of hadith (*riwāyat al-ḥadīth*) and its understanding (*dirāya/fiqh*) have always existed side-by-side.

Nevertheless, students at this madrasa study Islamic sciences as well as other subjects. As we entered the classroom, where all the students were waiting for the arrival of Shaykh Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani, they all simultaneously uttered out aloud, "*Assālamu 'alaykum waraḥmatullāhi wabarkātuh*." The respected Shaykh then took the stage and delivered a short Arabic speech (*naṣīḥa*) in which he said, "Allah blessed us to visit this land which was filled with knowledge and religion; from where great luminaries, *muḥaddithūn* and *fuqahā* hailed. It is an honour to visit this madrasa, named after—as mentioned to me—a Naqshbandi Shaykh, who was the founder. *Al-Ḥamdu lillāh*,

this madrasa is filled with students, and Allah Most High has favoured students of sacred knowledge over others. Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him) said, "The best amongst you is the one who learns the Qur'an and teaches it" (*Bukhari and Muslim*). Since you are all students, I advise you to study well and work hard, so that you become from amongst the pious '*ulamā*'. Real knowledge is that which is accompanied by action. Therefore, work hard in your studies and thereafter ensure to live every aspect of your lives in accordance with the Sunna, which is the main objective of our lives. I pray Allah grant this institute success and acceptance, *Āmīn*."

After the *naṣīḥa* and its translation in Uzbek, we bid farewell to the madrasa. The students all stood respectfully in a long line outside, to bid farewell to the Shaykh—which was a pleasant sight to witness—and he audibly said *salām* to them whilst walking past and headed back to his car.

Traditional Uzbek Lunch

We continued our journey and after about twenty minutes or so, we passed through the city of Shahrīsabz. Historically known as 'Kesh' or 'Kish', Shahrīsabz is one of Central Asia's most ancient cities. The city's name was changed to Shahrīsabz due to the excessive greenery in and around the city, since it means 'city of green' in Persian. Passing in and out of the city, it was easy to understand why the city had been given this name; the area had a lot of greenery and vegetation. The city is also known today as the birthplace of Taymur Lang (mentioned previously).

We stopped at a village just outside the city of Shahrīsabz, where lunch had been organized by our hosts at the house of one of the locals of the village. In very traditional settings, we experienced Uzbek cuisine first-hand—consisting of soup, meat dishes, Uzbek bread and many other items. The hosts were very hospitable towards our respected Shaykh and the rest of us. May Allah bless them and grant them the good of this life and the next, *Āmīn*. We also performed our *Zuhr* prayers here in congregation behind Mufti Muhammad

Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him) and then continued with our journey to Tirmidh.

Imam Abū 'Īsā al-Tirmidhī

It was around 6 pm when we finally reached the fringes of Tirmidh. However, before entering the city, we proceeded to the mausoleum and beautiful grounds where the great *muḥaddith*, Imam Tirmidhī (may Allah have mercy on him), is buried. Born in 209 AH, his full name is Muhammad ibn 'Īsā ibn Sawra/Sūra ibn Mūsā ibn al-Ḍaḥḥāk al-Sulamī al-Būghī al-Tirmidhī—he belonged to the Banū Sulaym tribe, hence al-Sulamī; and al-Būghī is in reference to his hometown and place of birth, Bugh, located outside the city of Tirmidh. After receiving his early education in his hometown, Imam Tirmidhī (may Allah have mercy on him) travelled to Baghdad, Basra, Kufa, Isfahan, Khurasan, Makka and Madina. He studied hadith under numerous great personalities of his time, such as Aḥmad ibn Mānī^c, Qutayba ibn Sa'īd and Maḥmūd ibn Ghaylān. He also studied under Imam Bukhari (may Allah have mercy on him) and enjoyed a close relationship with him. Once Imam Bukhari said to him, "I have benefited from you more than you have benefitted from me." Some scholars state that this refers to when a student is very intelligent and asks challenging questions, the teacher is forced to exert extra effort, due to which the teacher himself benefits. He also has the honour of his teacher Imam Bukhari relating two hadiths from him, both of which Imam Tirmidhī relates in his book and then states, "Muhammad ibn Ismā'īl [al-Bukhari] has heard this hadith from me."

Along with his famous *Al-Jāmi' al-Sunan*—one of the six major hadith collections—his other well-known works include *Al-Shamā'il al-Muḥammadiyya* (one of the best works on Prophetic traits and character), *Kitāb al-'Ilal al-Kabīr* and *Al-'Ilal al-Ṣaghīr* (both important reference works on hadith discrepancies). He was also known for his piety and God-consciousness (*taqwā*) and abstinence (*zuhd*). He would weep excessively out of the fear of Allah, such that towards

this madrasa is filled with students, and Allah Most High has favoured students of sacred knowledge over others. Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him) said, "The best amongst you is the one who learns the Qur'an and teaches it" (*Bukhari and Muslim*). Since you are all students, I advise you to study well and work hard, so that you become from amongst the pious '*ulamā*'. Real knowledge is that which is accompanied by action. Therefore, work hard in your studies and thereafter ensure to live every aspect of your lives in accordance with the Sunna, which is the main objective of our lives. I pray Allah grant this institute success and acceptance, *Āmīn*."

After the *naṣīḥa* and its translation in Uzbek, we bid farewell to the madrasa. The students all stood respectfully in a long line outside, to bid farewell to the Shaykh—which was a pleasant sight to witness—and he audibly said *salām* to them whilst walking past and headed back to his car.

Traditional Uzbek Lunch

We continued our journey and after about twenty minutes or so, we passed through the city of Shahrīsabz. Historically known as 'Kesh' or 'Kish', Shahrīsabz is one of Central Asia's most ancient cities. The city's name was changed to Shahrīsabz due to the excessive greenery in and around the city, since it means 'city of green' in Persian. Passing in and out of the city, it was easy to understand why the city had been given this name; the area had a lot of greenery and vegetation. The city is also known today as the birthplace of Taymur Lang (mentioned previously).

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the end of his life, he lost his eyesight. He passed away in the year 279 AH at the age of 70. May Allah shower him with mercy and reward him in abundance, *Āmin*. (*Tadhkirat al-Ḥuffāz* and other references)

Imam Tirmidhī (may Allah have mercy on him) is buried some 60 kilometres from the city of Tirmidh, near the town of Sherobad, known as Būgh in his time, where, next to a large graveyard, lies a newly built mausoleum surrounded by beautiful gardens. We parked our cars and entered the main entrance of the grounds. Many locals had gathered in anticipation of Shaykh al-Islam Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him). We first made our way to the grave of the great Imam located in a room (burial chamber), built as a multi-structure tombstone and adorned with inscriptions. We all stood before the grave, reciting *al-Fātiḥa* and other portions of the Qur'an and offering our *salām*. We then sat down for a few minutes, and our dear Shaykh recited the one and only *thulāthī* narration from Imam Tirmidhī's *Sunan*. The words of the hadith are as follows, "A time shall come upon the people in which being patient on one's religion will be like grasping a [burning] ember." He then granted permission (*ijāza*) to everyone present to relate Imam Tirmidhī's book and all other hadiths that he has received from his teachers. I was then privileged to recite the opening hadith of Imam Tirmidhī's book to our dear Shaykh and after me his son, Dr. Mawlānā Imran Ashraf Usmani, also read the same. The words of the first hadith are, "Allah does not accept any prayer without purity, and neither does He accept charity from goods acquired through illegal means."

The Shaykh was very emotional, given he has taught Imam Tirmidhī's *Al-Jāmi' al-Sunan* for nearly thirty years of his life (his lectures are recorded and published in the very popular 3-volume *Dars Tirmidhī* and the subsequent 2-volume *Taqrīr Tirmidhī*). He said to all those present, "Everyone supplicate for me that Allah accept whatever deficient service (*khidma*) I have accomplished in relation to *Sunan al-Tirmidhī* through His granting (*tawfiq*), forgive my shortcomings, accept it and grant Imam Tirmidhī all the reward."

It was a very emotional moment for me too on a personal level, since I was visiting the *maqām* of Imam Tirmidhī in the company of two teachers under whom I studied his *Sunan*. I studied the entire book with Shaykh Mufti Shabbir Ahmad (of the UK) at the renowned Dār al-'Ulūm seminary (Bury, UK) and the first volume with Shaykh al-Islam Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani at Jāmi'ah Dār al-'Ulūm in Karachi (Pakistan). As we stood up to depart from the chamber, I mentioned this point to both my teachers, *Al-Ḥamdu lillāh*. Moreover, I am honoured, despite my unworthiness, to have been teaching the book for the last five or six years through the grace of Allah Most Gracious.

With these thoughts and sentiments, I departed the grave chamber and we all made our way to the beautiful mosque built within the complex for *Āṣr* prayers. The mosque was filled with locals and others who had come from afar. Thus, after *Āṣr*, Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him) delivered a speech in Arabic (with simultaneous Uzbek translation) in which he explained the first hadith of *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, which we had recited at the graveside. The summary of what he said is as follows:

"I am honoured to visit this historic area where one of the great imams of hadith, Imam Abū 'Īsā al-Tirmidhī (may Allah have mercy on him), was born, and we are honoured to have visited his grave. When we were by his grave, we recited the opening hadith of his book *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī*, in which Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him) said, "Allah does not accept any prayer without purity, neither does He accept charity from goods acquired through illegal means." This hadith consists of two parts. The meaning of the first part is that Allah Most High only accepts prayer with purity such as ablution (*wuḍū'*) or, where required, ritual bath (*ghusl*). This is the apparent meaning of the hadith, as outlined by the jurists (*fuqahā*). However, the pious men (*awliyā*) of Allah do not merely look at the apparent meaning of hadiths; rather, they look more deeply. As such, '*ṭuhūr*' (purity) is not restricted to external purification through *wuḍū'* and *ghusl*; rather, one's heart must also be pure from those things that go

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against the objective of prayer. For example, performing *salāt* out of ostentation or for show—although, technically valid—is not accepted by Allah. As such, when we pray, we must ensure that we are externally pure, as well as internally pure with devotion and sincerity and perform *salāt* to earn the pleasure of Allah Almighty. This aspect of prayer generally cannot be achieved except by staying in the company of the pious and righteous.

The meaning of the second part of the hadith is that Allah Most High does not accept charity from wealth that has been acquired through deception. This was in reference to when someone took booty (*māl al-ghanīma*) during warfare, before its distribution, and then gave it in charity. For, it is not accepted by Allah because it was taken wrongfully. As such, whenever wealth is acquired through unlawful means such as usury (*ribā*), gambling (*qimār*), bribery (*rishwa*), Allah will not accept it, if given in charity—unless it is with the intention of disposing of it (without the intention of being rewarded for it). Many a time, wealth is acquired via unlawful means, such as bank interest or selling alcohol. Such wealth is not accepted by Allah as charity. The ruling regarding unlawful wealth is that it must be returned to its rightful owners. If this is not possible, it should be given away as *ṣadaqa* without the intention of earning rewards, but, rather, merely to dispose of unlawful wealth.

This hadith, in its application, covers the whole of religion: external and internal purity, as well as purity of wealth, because unlawful wealth is impure. We pray Allah Most High make our entire lives pure and in accordance with His pleasure, *Āmīn*.”

With these beautiful words of *naṣīḥa* from our beloved Shaykh, we departed the mosque and headed towards our cars. The attendees were all trying to get a glimpse of the Shaykh and meet him. However, it was not possible for him to meet everyone individually. On our way out, I suggested to our Shaykh's grandson, Abdullah Usmani, that he should also recite a hadith from *Sunan al-Tirmidhī* to his grandfather. Accordingly, he requested his grandfather and we once again briefly

paused at the grave of Imam Tirmidhī and Abdullah recited the first hadith of the *Sunan*. One of my dear friends, Mawlānā Faruq Pandor (of Manchester, UK), was also on this trip, along with his son. He asked the Shaykh if his son could also read the hadith, to which he granted permission. In this way, we were once again blessed to have the first hadith recited next to the resting place of Imam Tirmidhī (may Allah have mercy on him).

Ḥakīm Tirmidhī

From here, we continued our journey towards the actual city of Tirmidh and reached the city by *Ṣalāt al-Maghrib*. We performed *Maghrib* at the mosque near which is the resting place of another well-known scholar attributed to Tirmidh, Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muhammad ibn ‘Alī ibn Ḥasan ibn Bishr—better known as Ḥakīm Tirmidhī (may Allah have mercy on him). Born in the beginning of the third century in Tirmidh, he is mostly remembered as an author on *taṣawwuf*. His famous work of hadith is *Nawādir al-Uṣūl*—although, it does contain many weak narrations. His other works include *Khatm al-Awliyā’*, *Al-Radd ‘alā al-Rāfiḍa* and *Bad‘u Sha’ni Abi ‘Abdillāh* (his autobiography).

Later at dinner, Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him) mentioned that Ḥakīm Tirmidhī had some controversial and somewhat problematic opinions attributed to him, because of which he was refuted by other scholars. Of these was that sainthood (*wilāya*) has finality, just as prophethood has a last and final Prophet. His book *Khatm al-Wilāya* caused controversy in which he is thought to have held the belief that the status of *wilāya* is higher than that of *nubuwwa* (prophethood)—although, other scholars tried to give good interpretations (*ta’wīl*) of his statements. Towards the end of his life, *taṣawwuf*/sufism overcame him. Only Allah knows best.

Nevertheless, we performed *Maghrib* at the beautifully designed and relatively new mosque, and thereafter offered *salām* and recited *al-Fātiḥa* at his grave. Incidentally, this was the only grave we wit-

nessed throughout our visit to have been located within a mosque. My colleague, Shaykh Yusuf ibn Shabbir, had brought a copy of *Nawādir al-Uṣūl* with him. Whilst standing by the grave of Ḥakīm Tirmidhī, he requested Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him) if he could recite the opening hadith from it. The Shaykh agreed; thus, we all heard the first hadith from Ḥakīm Tirmidhī's book by his grave. Thereafter, we headed for our hotel in the city of Tirmidh.

The City of Tirmidh (Termez)

It wasn't long before we arrived at the Silk Road Hotel in the centre of the new part of the city, where we were scheduled to stay for the night. Tirmidh—or Termez, as it is now spelt—is also a historic city and very close to the border with Afghanistan. The Afghan city of Mazar-e-Sharif is very close from here across the border, and also the River Oxus/Amu (*Jayhūn*) is nearby. Shaykh Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him) expressed a desire to visit River *Jayhūn*, but due to limited time we were unable to visit it. *Jayhūn*—as mentioned in the beginning—is the river which is referred to in classical books with the phrase '*mā warā al-nahr*' (the land beyond the river).

The date when the old city was founded, located a few kilometres west of the modern city, is not known—although, what is known is that the city is very ancient. In 705 CE, the city was captured by the Arabs and it became one of the centres of Islam during the Abbasid rule. The troops of Genghis Khan did not leave this city either and, after a two-day siege, destroyed it. During the Soviet–Afghan War (1979–1989), Tirmidh was used as an important military base by the Soviets. We did not visit the old part of the city, but the new city today is very clean and developed. I particularly liked the designs of the houses and buildings within the city. The climate here is warmer than other parts of Uzbekistan. However, since the city is very close to the Afghan border, there are some tensions and, therefore, we were advised by our hosts not to venture outside the hotel.

We had dinner at the hotel and, after '*Ishā*' prayers, retired to our rooms.

THURSDAY APRIL 18 (DAY FIVE)

Departure for the Capital Tashkent

On Thursday morning, after *Fajr* and breakfast, we departed from Tirmidh by air for the Uzbek capital, Tashkent. We left our hotel and headed to the small, but modern, Tirmidh (Termez) airport. The Uzbekistan Airways flight was slightly delayed. Hence, whilst waiting at the departure gate, we managed to discuss a few issues with Shaykh al-Islam Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him). Amongst other things, he mentioned his habit of keeping a file, which is divided into different sections based on subjects. Whenever he comes across something of note, whilst reading books, he records it under the relevant section. I mentioned to him that he has a published book called *Tarashe*, which basically is a recording of such notes, to which he mentioned that the second and third volumes will soon be published. He also stated that we should always consider ourselves as means in any work (*khidma*) we carry out and that *tawfiq* is only from Allah Almighty. He gave an analogy of a person writing with a pen, in that we are mere pens and it is Allah who is the real author.

Soon it was time for us to proceed to the plane and we all made our way. The local Uzbek brothers, as well as the UK guests, continued talking to the Shaykh until we climbed the steps of the plane and took our seats. As the plane took off, I noticed a river, which most probably was the River Oxus (*Jayhūn*), and thus we at least managed to see it from the air, *Al-Ḥamdu lillāh!*

City of Tashkent

After about an hour and a half, we landed in Tashkent. Tashkent (pronounced Toshkent in Uzbek, and Tashqand in Arabic) is the capital and largest city of Uzbekistan, and the most populated in former Soviet Central Asia. It is located in the north-east of the country, close to the Kazakhstan border. The meaning of Tashkent or Tashqand is 'city of stones'—derived from the Persian 'Qand' or 'Kanda' (meaning a city

or town), and 'Tash' (meaning stone). In olden times, Muslim Arabs called the city and its surrounding region 'Al-Shāsh.' Thus, the great scholars of Islam who have the attribution 'Al-shāshī' hailed from this area, such as the author of the famous book on principles of Hanafi Jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), titled *Uṣūl al-Shāshī*. The city's name later evolved to Shashqand, then to Tashqand and, later, Tashkent.

Genghis Khan destroyed this city too, as part of his mass destruction of various cities—but the city was rebuilt and profited from the Silk Road. In 1865 CE, it fell to the Russian Empire and became the capital of Russian Turkestan. In Soviet times, Tashkent witnessed major growth and demographic changes due to forced deportations from throughout the Soviet Union. Today, as the capital of independent Uzbekistan, it is a busy and vibrant city like any other capital city, with some wonderful architectural sights and beautifully constructed mosques. It has an ethnically diverse population, with ethnic Uzbeks forming the dominant ethnic group.

Shaykh al-Islam Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him) was received at the airport by Shaykh Muhammad Ismā'il (the son of the previously-mentioned Shaykh Muhammad al-Sadiq and current head of Dār al-Hilāl), Shaykh Ayyūb al-Kāsānī (advisor to the Grand Mufti of Uzbekistan) and others. Since time was short, it was decided that, rather than go to our hotel, we should head straight from the airport to the Al-Muṣḥaf al-Uthmānī museum.

Al-Muṣḥaf al-Uthmānī

We arrived at the famous religious centre of Tashkent, the Hast/Hazrat-Imam complex, located in the old town. This probably is the most visited religious complex by tourists, both Muslims and non-Muslims. Around 2007, reconstruction of this historical sight took place and work commenced on large-scale building and refurbishment. The complex is situated around the tomb of one of the great scholars of this region, Imam Qaffāl al-Shāshī (may Allah have mercy on him), and thus 'Hast-Imam' is in reference to him. On the territory of the

Hast-Imam complex lie a few architectural buildings, such as (1) the luxurious Hast-Imam Mosque with space for 5,000 worshippers (decorated with splendid work of woodcarvers and two minarets with a height of 52 metres), (2) historical building of the Barakhan Madrasa (built around 1500 CE), (3) tomb of Imam Qaffāl al-Shāshī (may Allah have mercy on him) and (4) the Al-Mushaf al-Uthmānī museum. The whole complex is definitely worth visiting. The recreational constructions around the buildings, such as the new squares and pavements, exotic trees, shrubs and flowers from different countries really add to its beauty.

We made our way to the Al-Mushaf al-Uthmānī museum, where the oldest manuscript of the Qur'an—written during the era of Sayyidunā 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān (may Allah be pleased with him)—is preserved. Sayyidunā 'Uthmān (may Allah be pleased with him) had the Qur'an put together into one single copy (*muṣḥaf*) in order to save people from making mistakes whilst reciting, and from that several manuscripts were copied and distributed to different countries. Various explanations are given regarding the manuscript's arrival to central Asia, of which one is that it was brought to Samarqand in 14th Century CE by Taymur/Timur Lang from Iraq. It was kept in Samarqand for many years and, thereafter, in the library of Saint Petersburg, during the Russian and Soviet times. In 1924, upon the request of the 'ulamā' of Tashkent, it was transported via a special train to Tashkent.

It was an honour to see this old manuscript of the Qur'an stored in a special glass vessel. Written in the Kūfī script without dots, the size of each page is 53 x 68 cm and there are 338 pages in total. The pages are made of deer hide, and it is also said that the stain of Sayyidunā 'Uthmān's blood is on some of the pages. Only Allah knows best. The museum library also holds other rare and old manuscripts of the Qur'an and translations in other languages. I particularly noticed on display the Urdu translation of the Qur'an, with brief explanatory notes, by Shaykh al-Islam Mawlānā Shabbir Ahmad Uthmani of the Indian subcontinent (may Allah have mercy on him).

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Al-Muṣḥaf al-Uthmānī

We arrived at the famous religious centre of Tashkent, the Hast/Hazrat-Imam complex, located in the old town. This probably is the most visited religious complex by tourists, both Muslims and non-Muslims. Around 2007, reconstruction of this historical sight took place and work commenced on large-scale building and refurbishment. The complex is situated around the tomb of one of the great scholars of this region, Imam Qaffāl al-Shāshī (may Allah have mercy on him), and thus 'Hast-Imam' is in reference to him. On the territory of the

Hast-Imam complex lie a few architectural buildings, such as (1) the luxurious Hast-Imam Mosque with space for 5,000 worshippers (decorated with splendid work of woodcarvers and two minarets with a height of 52 metres), (2) historical building of the Barakhan Madrasa (built around 1500 CE), (3) tomb of Imam Qaffāl al-Shāshī (may Allah have mercy on him) and (4) the Al-Mushaf al-Uthmānī museum. The whole complex is definitely worth visiting. The recreational constructions around the buildings, such as the new squares and pavements, exotic trees, shrubs and flowers from different countries really add to its beauty.

We made our way to the Al-Mushaf al-Uthmānī museum, where the oldest manuscript of the Qur'an—written during the era of Sayyidunā 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān (may Allah be pleased with him)—is preserved. Sayyidunā 'Uthmān (may Allah be pleased with him) had the Qur'an put together into one single copy (*muṣḥaf*) in order to save people from making mistakes whilst reciting, and from that several manuscripts were copied and distributed to different countries. Various explanations are given regarding the manuscript's arrival to central Asia, of which one is that it was brought to Samarqand in 14th Century CE by Taymur/Timur Lang from Iraq. It was kept in Samarqand for many years and, thereafter, in the library of Saint Petersburg, during the Russian and Soviet times. In 1924, upon the request of the 'ulamā' of Tashkent, it was transported via a special train to Tashkent.

It was an honour to see this old manuscript of the Qur'an stored in a special glass vessel. Written in the Kūfī script without dots, the size of each page is 53 x 68 cm and there are 338 pages in total. The pages are made of deer hide, and it is also said that the stain of Sayyidunā 'Uthmān's blood is on some of the pages. Only Allah knows best. The museum library also holds other rare and old manuscripts of the Qur'an and translations in other languages. I particularly noticed on display the Urdu translation of the Qur'an, with brief explanatory notes, by Shaykh al-Islam Mawlānā Shabbir Ahmad Uthmani of the Indian subcontinent (may Allah have mercy on him).

Imam Al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī

Next, within the same complex, we visited the neighbouring tomb of the imam of hadith, Shāfi'ī *fiqh* and principles (*uṣūl*) of *fiqh*, Imam Abū Bakr al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī (may Allah have mercy on him)—his nickname 'Qaffāl' is in reference to the profession of locksmith. Born in 291 AH, he was regarded a major Shāfi'ī jurist and imam of his time. Imam Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī (may Allah have mercy on him) said that, "he was the most knowledgeable amongst the people of Transoxiana in the science of *uṣūl al-fiqh*." His teachers include Abū Bakr ibn Khuzayma, Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, amongst others, and his students include Ibn Mandah, Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī and others (may Allah have mercy on all of them). Imam Dhahabī (may Allah have mercy on him) states that, "the Shāfi'ī *madhhab* spread in the Transoxiana area due to him." He authored many works, such as *Kitāb fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh* and "*Al-Jadal al-Ḥasan*." He passed away in the year 366 AH in Tashkent. (*Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā*)

Our hosts mentioned that in olden times, only this area of Tashkent/Shāsh had predominantly followers of the Shāfi'ī School, whilst the residents of other cities such as Bukhara and Samarqand were all followers of the Hanafi School. This was probably due to the influence and teachings of this great imam (may Allah have mercy on him).

We offered our *salām* and recited Qur'an at his grave (and the grave of some others that were located within the same building). Thereafter, we headed to our hotel for lunch, *Zuhr* and afternoon rest. Shaykh Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him) and his family stayed in one hotel and our group from the UK stayed at another hotel.

Dār al-Hilāl Publishing House

In the evening, we first visited the headquarters of Dār al-Hilāl, the official host of Shaykh Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him). We were given a guided tour of the works and activities

of the organization and witnessed first-hand their sophisticated and pioneering work. Founded by the late Shaykh Muhammad al-Ṣādiq (may Allah have mercy on him), and now running under the patronage of his son, Shaykh Muhammad Ismā'īl, the organization specialises in mass printing of Qur'an copies and distributing them widely. Specific days are designated for the mass distribution of the *muṣḥaf* to hundreds of people outside in the open. The organisation also publishes translations of major hadith books to Uzbek by Shaykh Muhammad al-Ṣādiq and many other books. May Allah accept their efforts, *Āmīn*.

Reading of Al-Awā'il al-Sunbuliyya

Dār al-Hilāl had organized a session of reading hadiths from the book *Al-Awā'il al-Sunbuliyya* with our respected Shaykh in the adjacent hall. After performing *Āsr*, we all made our way to the large hall, where a few hundred students of knowledge and teachers/*ulamā'* had gathered. *Al-Awā'il al-Sunbuliyya* is a collection of the first hadiths (*awā'il*) from the various well-known hadith books, compiled by the *muḥaddith*, Muhammad Sa'īd ibn Sunbul al-Makkī (d. 1175 AH). Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him) took the stage and he himself recited most of the hadiths and, thereafter, other scholars also recited and thereby the reading of the entire book was completed in the gathering. Thereafter, our respected Shaykh delivered a short speech/*naṣiḥa* in Arabic, the summary of which is as follows:

He first praised the late and former patron of Dār al-Hilāl, Shaykh Muhammad al-Ṣādiq (may Allah have mercy on him), saying, "After visiting and seeing this centre personally, my eyes have cooled and it has increased my love for the late Shaykh and his son, Shaykh Muhammad Ismā'īl. All praise is to Allah that I had met Shaykh Muhammad al-Ṣādiq on many occasions in international conferences, but I was unaware of the extent of his knowledge and great works, which he has passed on to his son. I thank Shaykh Muhammad Ismā'īl for granting me this opportunity to read the book today. Although I am not worthy of giving anyone permission in hadith, Shaykh

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Muhammad Ismā'il asked me to read the *Al-Awā'il al-Sunbuliyya* which may result in general permission (*ijāza*) of all the books whose beginning hadiths are included within it."

Thereafter, the Shaykh recited the *Al-Awā'il al-Sunbuliyya* and then proceeded to say, "I have permission in hadith from various *shuyūkh*, the names of whom have been compiled in my *thabat* (collection of hadith chains and permissions) which will be published soon, *in shā Allah*. I grant all those present permission in hadith and I remind myself and all of you to fear Allah, both in private and public, and success (*tawfiq*) is from Allah alone."

He then mentioned the pioneering hadith project that is currently in progress at his Jāmi'ah Dār al-'Ulūm Karachi: the hadith encyclopaedia. He said that work has commenced on compiling and codifying all the hadiths into a single compilation with a global numbering system. 960 published and unpublished works have been used thus far and, to date, the first volume covering the 'chapter on faith' (*imān*) has been published. The second, third and fourth volumes will soon be published, which cover the chapters on knowledge, purity and holding fast to the Qur'an and Sunna.

Finally, he ended with some advice, saying that knowledge on its own is not enough; rather, one must act in accordance with the knowledge. The main objective of learning hadith is to act upon the Sunna in all aspects of one's life. Some orientalists have more knowledge of hadith than even Muslims, but their knowledge is of no benefit. One should always seek the pleasure of Allah in all matters.

The session ended with a local brother completing the Qur'an by reciting the ending and beginning *sūrahs* of the Qur'an. The Shaykh commented on this too, saying, "This is based on a Prophetic hadith. A man asked, "O Messenger of Allah, which deed is the most beloved to Allah?" The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) replied, "*Al-hāll al-murtahil*." The man said, "What is *al-hāll al-murtahil*?" He replied, "The one who starts from the beginning of the Qur'an until he reaches the end, and when he stops for a rest, he

immediately carries on" (*Tirmidhī*). Thereafter, the respected Shaykh made a *du'a'* and the event came to an end.

After the event, the Shaykh and his son, Dr. Imran Ashraf Usmani, held a private meeting with some local banking and business professionals concerning Islamic finance. Thereafter, we went for dinner at the house of an associate of Shaykh Muhammad Ismā'il. The host went out of his way in honouring our dear Shaykh, with various types of food items and, especially, a variety of tropical fruits on the menu! The Shaykh was in a very jovial mood and engaged in light-hearted discussions. Persian poetry came under discussion, and he made a comment saying, "It is as if the Persian language was created for poetry!"

After dinner, we all headed back to our hotels and rested, *Al-Hamdu lillāh*.

FRIDAY APRIL 19 (DAY SIX)

Meeting with the Grand Mufti

On the morning of *Jumu'a al-Mubāraka*, a meeting was arranged between Shaykh al-Islam Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani and the official Grand Mufti of Uzbekistan, Shaykh Usman Khan Alimov (may Allah protect them both). Born in 1950 CE in the Samarqand region of Uzbekistan, Shaykh Alimov studied initially at the Mir Arab Madrasa in Bukhara and later at the Qarawiyyin University in Fez, Morocco. He served as an imam for many years at the Grand Mosque in Samarqand, and is also a member of the Muslim World League (*Rābi'a al-'Alam al-Islami*).

We also accompanied our respected Shaykh to the meeting which was conducted at the headquarters of the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan. The Grand Mufti was accompanied by the vice-chairman of the Muslim Board, Shaykh Abdul-Aziz Mansur, and others. Shaykh Mansur is an author of many books and a member of the International Fiqh Academy. He mentioned at the meeting that he has met Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him) at several meetings previously.

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Sitting around a round table, discussions commenced between our respected Shaykh and the Mufti of Uzbekistan through the medium of a translator (although, the Uzbek Mufti knows Arabic, he felt more comfortable with translation). Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani spoke first, the summary of what he said is as follows:

"I do not have words to express the respect and veneration I feel in my heart towards these lands. I would like to first thank the Mufti for giving us the opportunity to meet here at the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan headquarters—an organization that is the flag bearer of the message of Islam in these lands. I visited this country in 1992 and toured Bukhara, Samarqand and Tashkent, but was unable to visit Tirmidh during that visit. Since then, I have had a desire to visit this country for a second time, but it was not possible. However, Allah Most High made this possible through the invitation of Shaykh Muhammad Ismā'il (of Dār al-Hilāl) and, thus, I was able to visit all four cities: Bukhara, Samarqand, Tashkent and Tirmidh.

I have seen a big change and progress in these cities since my last visit 27 years ago, both in terms of infrastructure, development and cleanliness, and also from a spiritual perspective. I would like to congratulate the respected Mufti and other scholars of this country, who are continuously striving in order to return this country to its former Islamic identity. I am aware that this country underwent a very difficult period during the Soviet era, when Muslims were prevented from practising their faith and mosques were demolished, but *Al-Ḥamdu lillāh* you still emerged as strong Muslims after these seventy years. The sweetness of faith (*imān*) in your hearts is far greater than in our hearts, because we inherited Islam from our forefathers without even a prickle touching our feet in the path of Islam. You have had to endure patience and hardships to preserve your faith and the faith of all the Muslims. This is only due to the grace (*faḍl*) of Allah Most High and, thereafter, the scholars who strove in this regard—in particular, people like Shaykh Muhammad al-Ṣādiq (may Allah have mercy on him), who played a major role in reviving the *Dīn* and Islamic knowledge.

Also, people like yourself [addressing the Mufti], since you remained patient and, as you mentioned, you were an imam for thirty years in a mosque of Bukhara and, by this, you were steadfast on the *Dīn* and spread the teachings of Islam in these lands.

The greatest difference I have witnessed between my two visits (1992 and 2019) is that religious organizations are much more active and have increased in terms of impact and result. When I first visited, there were no madrasas or active mosques, but *Al-Ḥamdu lillāh* during this visit I have seen great vigour in all the various cities, due to your efforts. We found the various religious institutes—established by the Muslim Board—to be active and filled with students and teachers. The path to seek knowledge has been made easy for them, buildings have been constructed for them and their needs have been catered for—even in small towns such as the Khawāja Bukhara Madrasa in the remote town of Kitab. On top of all of this, we were delighted to witness the newly-built Institute of Higher Islamic Studies in Samarqand (near the grave of Imam Bukhari) and we were honoured to be one of its first visitors. We pray Allah Almighty make it a prominent Islamic university and that it revives our heritage in these lands. We would like to thank the current President of this country for granting an opportunity and making matters easy for the revival of the *Dīn*, and we pray Allah grant him further *tawfiq* to carry out that which pleases Him Most High.

What also makes us happy is that the general public love Islam and love Muslims from all backgrounds. The country has now opened its doors for Muslims to visit these prestigious regions. We are honoured by this and will always encourage scholars and Muslims in general to visit this country. We have seen many groups of Muslims visiting from different countries. This gives us hope that Uzbekistan will, once again, be a centre for Islam and Muslims, *in shā Allah*.

I was extremely happy when I met yesterday, at the Dār al-Hilāl headquarters, people from the banking sector, who showed a strong desire in establishing an Islamic financial institution here, and they

wanted to learn how to go about doing that. Today, I was visited in my hotel by the minister of tourism, who expressed a desire to have an Islamic financial institution established here, and I promised him that we are prepared to offer whatever help and support we can in this regard. I suggested that it may require some changes in the central bank regulations, and he welcomed this suggestion. The Muslim Board will have a big role to play too in this regard, *in shā Allah*. We can begin by offering training courses on Islamic finance to students, either in Pakistan or here in Uzbekistan. We have a Centre of Islamic Economics at our Dār al-‘Ulūm in Karachi, which can facilitate this.

I apologize for taking much of your time. I pray Allah Almighty grant the Mufti *tawfiq* to carry on with his efforts and that they prove to be beneficial and effective for the Muslims of this country, *wassalāmu ‘alaykum wa rahmatullāhi wa barakātuh*.”

After these beautiful and extremely invaluable words from Shaykh Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him), the Mufti of Uzbekistan responded by agreeing that the situation for Muslims during the Soviet era was very difficult, and they are thankful for the freedom now. He mentioned that the late Shaykh Muhammad al-Sadiq was his teacher and, thus, his son, Shaykh Muhammad Ismā‘il, is the son of his teacher and very active in *da‘wa* work. He then went on to address our respected Shaykh and said, “We are in need of your knowledge and expertise in relation to the things you have mentioned, and thus we will be inviting you to Uzbekistan repeatedly. We would like you and other scholars from your institute to deliver lectures here, and we will start the process of having our scholars trained in Islamic finance and banking. The current Uzbekistan President has made things easy for us and opened doors for Islamic work to be carried out here, *Al-Ḥamdu lillāh*.”

The meeting ended with the Uzbekistan Mufti, Shaykh Usman Khan Alimov, gifting some books to our respected Shaykh and to us all.

Imam Bukhari Islamic Institute of Higher Education

After the meeting with the Grand Mufti, we made our way to one of the most established religious institutes and madrasas in Tashkent (and Uzbekistan as a whole)—the Imam Bukhari Institute of Higher Education (*Ma‘had al-Imām al-Bukhārī al-Islāmī al-‘Ālī*). Visiting the institute, located near the previously mentioned Hast Imam complex, was one of the highlights for me personally in our visit to Tashkent. I experienced a real desire for knowledge and goodness within the students and generally a feeling of positivity and spirituality (because of which I decided to pay a second visit to the institute the following day, the details of which shall follow later).

The institute (*ma‘had*) was established in 1971 and was the only functioning institute of higher/advanced education during the Soviet era. Students from countries such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Russia, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan and Bulgaria have studied here, and many have graduated and work as imams and in other fields. The various Islamic disciplines such as *‘aqīda*, *tafsīr*, hadith, *fiqh*, *uṣūl al-fiqh* and Arabic are taught, and many books taught in the *Dars Nizāmī* syllabus—such as *Al-Hidāya* and *Mishkāt al-Maṣābiḥ*—are part of the curriculum. Currently, there are approximately 400 students and 70 teachers. Separate classes for sisters are also held. There is a designated section for the memorization of the Qur’an and a department to teach foreign languages, such as English and Russian. The institute provides a degree qualification in Islamic studies, after which students may enrol at one of the major Uzbekistan Universities (such as the Tashkent Islamic University) to attain a master’s degree.

We entered the main prayer hall of the modern building of the institute, where a large group of students and teachers had gathered in anticipation of Shaykh Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani’s (may Allah protect him) arrival. The event commenced with our respected Shaykh reciting the hadith *al-musalsal bi ‘l-awwaliyya*/*hadith al-rahma*, and thereafter one of the students read the final hadith of Imam Tirmidhi’s

wanted to learn how to go about doing that. Today, I was visited in my hotel by the minister of tourism, who expressed a desire to have an Islamic financial institution established here, and I promised him that we are prepared to offer whatever help and support we can in this regard. I suggested that it may require some changes in the central bank regulations, and he welcomed this suggestion. The Muslim Board will have a big role to play too in this regard, *in shā Allah*. We can begin by offering training courses on Islamic finance to students, either in Pakistan or here in Uzbekistan. We have a Centre of Islamic Economics at our Dār al-‘Ulūm in Karachi, which can facilitate this.

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Imam Bukhari Islamic Institute of Higher Education

After the meeting with the Grand Mufti, we made our way to one of the most established religious institutes and madrasas in Tashkent (and Uzbekistan as a whole)—the Imam Bukhari Institute of Higher Education (*Ma‘had al-Imām al-Bukhārī al-Islāmī al-‘Ālī*). Visiting the institute, located near the previously mentioned Hast Imam complex, was one of the highlights for me personally in our visit to Tashkent. I experienced a real desire for knowledge and goodness within the students and generally a feeling of positivity and spirituality (because of which I decided to pay a second visit to the institute the following day, the details of which shall follow later).

The institute (*ma‘had*) was established in 1971 and was the only functioning institute of higher/advanced education during the Soviet era. Students from countries such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Russia, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan and Bulgaria have studied here, and many have graduated and work as imams and in other fields. The various Islamic disciplines such as *‘aqīda*, *tafsīr*, hadith, *fiqh*, *uṣūl al-fiqh* and Arabic are taught, and many books taught in the *Dars Nizāmī* syllabus—such as *Al-Hidāya* and *Mishkāt al-Maṣābiḥ*—are part of the curriculum. Currently, there are approximately 400 students and 70 teachers. Separate classes for sisters are also held. There is a designated section for the memorization of the Qur’an and a department to teach foreign languages, such as English and Russian. The institute provides a degree qualification in Islamic studies, after which students may enrol at one of the major Uzbekistan Universities (such as the Tashkent Islamic University) to attain a master’s degree.

We entered the main prayer hall of the modern building of the institute, where a large group of students and teachers had gathered in anticipation of Shaykh Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani’s (may Allah protect him) arrival. The event commenced with our respected Shaykh reciting the hadith *al-musalsal bi ‘l-awwaliyya/hadīth al-rahma*, and thereafter one of the students read the final hadith of Imam Tirmidhi’s

Sunan and the first hadith of Imam Ṭaḥāwī's *Sharḥ Ma'ānī al-Āthār*. Thereafter, our beloved Shaykh delivered an absolutely amazing pre-*Jumu'a* speech to the 'ulamā'/teachers and students present, which I hope to publish separately one day—both the original Arabic and its English translation. Nevertheless, here is the summary of the speech:

"It is an honour for me to be in your midst this blessed Friday at this blessed institute. We have just been informed of the curriculum taught here, and we also listened to some hadiths from *Sharḥ Ma'ānī al-Āthār* and *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*. I have also learnt that this institute plays a big role in teaching the Islamic sciences to the youth. I pray Allah Most High make it a light (*nūr*) of knowledge and that it produces scholars of knowledge and piety (*taqwā*).

The reality is that this land—the country of Uzbekistan, which I have been visiting for the last five days—was filled with knowledge (*'ilm*), practice (*'amal*), God-consciousness (*taqwā*), renunciation (*zuhd*) and gnosis (*ma'rifa*) of Allah. This land is considered as the teacher of students of Islamic sciences in every part of the world. One cannot be considered a scholar, if one does not study *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī* and the book of Abū Maṣ'ūr al-Māturidī. One cannot be considered a saint, if one is unaware of, or has no connection with, the teachings of Shaykh Bahā al-Dīn Naqshband and 'Abd al-Khāliq al-Gijdiwānī. As such, this land is filled with luminaries who spread the teachings of Islam to other parts of the world, including the Arab lands. The Arabs normally pride themselves in the fact that they are Arabs—and they have a right to do so, since the Qur'an was revealed in their language, the Sunna is in their language and the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) was an Arab. The Arabs do not easily acknowledge the superiority of non-Arabs. Despite this, even Arab scholars acknowledged and submitted before the great genius scholars who emerged from this land. The phrase "The scholars of Transoxiana (*mā warā al-nahr*) say" is famous in our books. Thus, the scholars of Transoxiana became an authoritative source of evidence for those on the other side of the river. I was saying to my

colleagues that I feel a strong fragrance of spirituality, knowledge and *taqwā*/piety in the air of Bukhara, Samarqand, Tashkent and Tirmidh. Those who have connection with *'ilm* may feel this. The air in this land is not normal like in other places. Rather, it holds the fragrance of these great scholars and pious men of Allah.

Indeed, a very difficult period passed on the people of this land, wherein they faced hardships and oppression from the communist regime. Despite this, at a time when even possessing a copy of the Qur'an (*muṣḥaf*) was deemed a crime, scholars preserved not only the Qur'an, but also books of hadith, *fiqh* and other sciences, and preserved their religion. Therefore, O people of Uzbekistan, you are role models for us in preserving one's *Dīn* and in the respect shown to Islam. We thank Allah Most High that He has now paved the way in these lands for a revival of Islamic knowledge, the example of which are institutes like this one. The same books that were destroyed and buried are now being taught as part of the syllabus in such institutes, *Al-Ḥamdu lillāh*. There was a time when it was difficult to find even one *muṣḥaf* in this country, but now—as I have been informed by Shaykh Muhammad Ismā'il (of Dār al-Hilāl)—one thousand copies of the Qur'an are to be published every day.

I advise you, dear students—and I am also a student like you—to value this opportunity, which was not available to your forefathers and ancestors. They were forced to study and teach secretly in underground bunkers, but you have this opportunity—so, value it. If properly valued, the lands of Transoxiana—and in particular Uzbekistan—can return to their former glory, knowledge and righteousness.

I would also like to remind you that knowledge on its own is not sufficient. Rather, it must be accompanied by action. It is said, "Knowledge without action is calamity (*wabāl*), and action without knowledge is misguidance (*ḍalāl*)." The difference between knowledge accompanied by action and knowledge without action is what Allah Most High has mentioned in the Qur'an: "It is only those who have knowledge among His slaves that fear Allah" (35:28). The awe

(*khashya*) of Allah should be the ultimate objective for every student. One's connection with Allah must be strong and deep, such that one always consider himself a servant of Allah. One was not created to have pride or be boastful before others; rather, to worship Allah. He Most High says, "I did not create the Jinn and Man except that they should worship Me" (51: 56). This 'worship' (*'ibāda*) is not restricted to mosques, praying, fasting, *Zakāt*, Hajj and *'Umrah*; rather, one should be dutiful to Allah in every aspect of one's life, such as when dealing with and treating one's spouse, parents, family, neighbours, etc. All of this is worship/*'ibāda*.

The ultimate objective of all the great men of Allah who have passed was to strengthen the slave's connection with his Lord. When students would visit these saints and sufis for guidance on self-reformation (I am referring to those on the Sunna, and not sufis involved in innovation, who have no connection with the Qur'an and Sunna), the spiritual masters would make their students undergo spiritual exercises (*mujāhadāt/riyādāt*) in order to train them to abandon egoistic desires such as pride. There are many examples of such training. However, we are weak beings and unable to tolerate the same kind of exercises. For this reason, one of the great scholars and saints of recent times in the Indian subcontinent, *Ḥakīm al-Umma* Shaykh Mawlānā Ashraf 'Alī Thānawī—a reviver of *taṣawwuf* in recent times, who explained the reality of real *taṣawwuf* after innovations and deviations had entered it, and simplified it. I am a student of one of his disciples, since my shaykh is Dr. 'Abdul Ḥayy 'Ārifī, who was a student of Mawlānā Thānawī. Likewise, my father, Mawlānā Mufti Muhammad Shafī', was also a student of Shaykh Thānawī (may Allah have mercy on all of them)—explains that we are unable to carry out the same type of spiritual exercises that were carried out by earlier masters of *taṣawwuf*. We are weak beings, and the *Dīn* of Allah is not for only the strong; rather, it is for everyone. Hence, he outlined simple actions—known in *taṣawwuf* terminology as *al-ṭarīq al-qalandarī*—that can be a means of building a strong connection with Allah Most High. Firstly, excessive

gratitude to Allah (*shukr*) for every major and minor bounty from Him. One should have a habit of constantly thanking Allah. Secondly, excessive supplication (*du'ā'*), even for minor things such as when one's shoe-lace is broken, as mentioned in the hadith.

The opening *sūra* of the Qur'an (*al-Fātiḥa*)—known as the essence of the Qur'an—its first three verses entail *shukr* and praise (*ḥamd*) for Allah, and the next three entail *du'ā'*. As such, the *sūra* comprises *shukr* in the beginning and *du'ā'* at the end, indicating that these two things are beloved to Allah Most High. *Shukr* saves a person from the misgivings of Satan, since he said, when expelled from Paradise, "Then I will come upon them from their front side and from their behind, and from their right and from their left. You will not find most of them grateful" (7: 17). This indicates that Satan overcomes people who are not thankful and grateful to Allah. So, we should engage excessively in *shukr* and *du'ā'*. This is what Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him) taught us by way of his daily supplications, such as the supplication of waking up, entering the bathroom, exiting the bathroom, entering the mosque, exiting the mosque, entering the house and travelling. All these supplications entail either *shukr* or *du'ā'*, and they are prescribed to build a strong connection with Allah. An analogy of this is a person who has travelled far from his home, but stays in touch with his family via phone calls and text messages, informing them of his wellbeing. Even though he is far from them, his connection remains constant with them. Similarly, these Prophetic supplications are a means of conversing with Allah Most High on a regular basis. I remind myself and all of you to keep hold of these supplications at every juncture of your life. May Allah grant us *tawfiq* and may our connection with Him be strong, *Āmīn*."

With these words, the amazing advice of Shaykh al-Islam Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him) came to an end. The attendees were all extremely moved by his words and benefitted immensely, *Al-Ḥamdu lillāh*. After the speech, the Shaykh was (once again) made to wear a local hat and coat, upon which he said jokingly,

"I have now become one of the servants (*khuddām*) of Transoxiana (*mā warā al-nahr*)!" They all thanked him and, thereafter, we performed *Jumu'a* prayers behind one of the local imams.

After *Jumu'a*, lunch was arranged at the house of one of the hosts and, thereafter, we returned to our hotels for afternoon rest.

Shaykh Zayn al-Din Mosque

Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him) had other commitments prior to *Maghrib*. Therefore, some of us from the UK—including Mufti Shabbir Ahmad—decided to visit the modern, beautiful and immaculately built Shaykh Zayn al-Din Mosque (named after a Yemeni Shaykh) in the new part of Tashkent. It is one of many recently built mosques that dominate the skyline of Tashkent city. Other mosques include the Minor (Manār/Minār) Congregational Mosque (which can hold approximately 7,000 worshippers at any one time), Masjid Suzuk Ota and the recently built complex in the name of Shaykh Muhammad al-Ṣādiq (yet to be inaugurated).

We first visited the graveyard located next to the Zayn al-Din Mosque, wherein lies the grave of Shaykh Muhammad al-Ṣādiq (may Allah have mercy on him), as well as many other scholars and those who memorized (*huffāz*) the Qur'an. Shaykh Muhammad al-Ṣādiq has been mentioned a number of times in this book, given the organization established by him (Dār al-Hilāl) was the official host of our respected Shaykh Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him). Shaykh Muhammad al-Ṣādiq played a big role in Uzbekistan's recent Islamic revival. He passed away in 2015 after a heart attack. We paused to recite some Qur'an at his simple grave, which had no solid structure built on it, in accordance with the Sunna. May Allah have mercy on his soul and grant him a high abode in Paradise, *Āmin*.

Thereafter, we offered *Maghrib* prayers at the Zayn al-Din Mosque, behind the imam named Yahya ibn Ubayd Allah, whose beautiful recitation we particularly enjoyed. The imam underwent his initial studies in Uzbekistan and thereafter spent six months at Al-Azhar University

in Cairo. After *ṣalāt*, we sat briefly in his office, as he explained to us that during Ramadan the Mosque gets full to the point that some worshippers are forced to pray outside on the road. This is also another sign of the revival of Islam in this country.

Farewell Dinner

We then made our way for dinner, arranged at the house of brother Rahmatullah (son-in-law of the late Shaykh Muhammad al-Ṣādiq). Many local scholars and important figures had been invited. Our respected Shaykh Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him) was delayed due to an interview, so we spent the time—whilst waiting for him—reciting the *thulāthiyyāt* hadiths from *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*.

During dinner, the attendees raised various issues and asked Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him) several questions. Of these was a question regarding Imam Bukhari's objective (*maqṣad*) behind his compilation of hadiths. The Shaykh replied by explaining that Imam Bukhari's objective was not to merely gather hadiths. Rather, his objective was to also express his *fiqh* positions. In relation to the famous saying "the *fiqh* of Imam Bukhari is found in his chapter headings", he mentioned that the manner in which Imam Bukhari (may Allah have mercy on him) deduces rulings and points of *fiqh* from a particular hadith is very subtle and often intricate, and this is the reason why sometimes a particular hadith is not found in the chapter where one would expect.

A question was posed regarding how to deal with contemporary *fiqh* issues. The respected Shaykh suggested that the *fiqh* discussions and resolutions of the International Islamic *Fiqh* Academy have been published by Dār al-Qalam in approximately 40 volumes, titled *Majalla al-Fiqh al-Islāmī*, which may be referred to—although, he does not concur with every resolution therein. He also mentioned his own work, *Buḥūth fī Qaḍāya Fiqhiyya Mu'āṣira*. He stated that at times we are hasty in thinking that classical *fiqh* works do not provide

solutions to modern issues, but that is not always the case. He gave an example of when a person's hand is amputated by Islamic penal law punishment (*ḥudūd*) and, thereafter, he wishes to reinstate his amputated hand through surgery. He stated that he found explicit texts regarding the issue in Māliki *fiqh* works. As such, he said, it is important to try one's utmost in finding solutions from the works of classical jurists (*fuqahā'*) and from *fiqh* texts (*juz'īyyāt*) that discuss issues which bear similarities to, and parallels with, modern issues.

In relation to a question about following the position of another *fiqh* School (*madhhab*), he stated that in matters of worship (*'ibādāt*) one should always try to follow the position of one's own school. However, there is scope in financial matters (*mu'amalāt*) to follow the position of another school, based on genuine need. However, this must only be done after consultation with other expert jurists, and not independently—as mentioned in the hadith related by Al-Ṭabarānī that one should consult righteous jurists, and not make a judgement independently.

The session ended with our respected Shaykh imparting two final pieces of advice. Firstly, he emphasized the importance of education—both Islamic, as well as secular, and that institutes need to be established wherein both types of education are imparted. This will also help reduce the gap between religious scholars and professionals in other fields. Secondly, he highlighted the importance of unity—especially, in these initial stages of Islamic revival in these lands. The Companions (may Allah be pleased with them) disagreed on many issues, but their hearts remained united and they offered prayers behind each other. If we remain united, we shall have a greater impact in our *da'wa* work. He mentioned the book of his late father, Shaykh Mawlānā Mufti Muhammad Shafī' (may Allah have mercy on him), titled *Ashiqāq am Khilāf* (Disagreement or Conflict?), which may be consulted in this regard.

After dinner, the head of Dār al-Hilāl (our official host) gifted our respected Shaykh a special hand-made ornament/frame made

from walnut tree. The UK guests accompanying him were also given gifts, after which the evening came to an end. It was an emotional moment for me, as I had to bid farewell to our beloved Shaykh, who was scheduled to depart early next morning for Pakistan. With much sadness, I embraced him and thanked him for granting me the opportunity—despite not being worthy—to be in his company throughout his visit to Uzbekistan. At the same time, I consoled myself with the knowledge that I would be seeing him soon, during his upcoming UK visit. With these thoughts of sadness, we returned to our hotel and retired to bed for the night.

SATURDAY APRIL 20 (DAY SEVEN)

Return to Imam Bukhari Institute

Shaykh al-Islam Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him) departed early Saturday morning, and some of the UK guests also left. However, I and my two friends, Shaykh Abdur-Rahman ibn Yusuf Mangera and Brother Yahya Batha, stayed over in Tashkent for one further day. After taking a rest in the morning, we once again visited the Imam Bukhari Institute of Higher Education (*Ma'had al-Imām al-Bukhārī al-Islāmī al-Ālī*), where we had performed *Jumu'a* prayers a day earlier and where our respected Shaykh delivered a pre-*Jumu'a* speech (I mentioned previously that after our visit on Friday, I wanted to revisit the institute).

We reached just prior to *Zuhr* prayers and were given a warm welcome by students and some of the teachers. They assembled in the main prayer hall (where, yesterday, our respected Shaykh delivered his speech) and requested Shaykh Abdur-Rahman ibn Yusuf and myself to deliver short speeches in Arabic. We felt that we had no choice but to oblige. We shared our experiences with them of our time studying Islamic sciences at various institutes in different countries and, in particular, the *Dars Nizāmī* syllabus. A short questions and answers session followed. The students were very inquisitive and eager to

learn about various aspects of Islamic knowledge. As we were leaving, they insisted that we have a group photo taken with all the students and some teachers, and that we give a short interview—which was recorded—regarding our impressions and thoughts on Uzbekistan.

The Tashkent Tower

Next, we visited the Tashkent Tower, which was built during the Soviet era and inaugurated in 1985. The tower is 1,200 feet (375 metres) high and stands as the 11th tallest building in the world, and the tallest structure in Central Asia. It is of a vertical cantilever structure and is constructed out of steel. The tower accommodates transmission equipment for radio, television and other types of communication. We purchased tickets (passport needed) and took the elevator to the 6th floor observation deck and enjoyed a good view of Tashkent city. There are also a couple of restaurants, where people come to dine.

Kokaldosh Madrasa and Surrounding Bazaars

Our next destination was the old and historic part of Tashkent. Here we visited the old Kokaldosh Madrasa, which was built at around 1570 CE by the Shaybanid Dynasty rulers. During the passing of time, the building was demolished, damaged, converted into a caravanserai, and used as a fortress and museum. In the 1990s, however, the building was restored as a religious school (*madrasa*). Currently around 150 students study here—at intermediate level (*wusta*)—the various Islamic sciences, as well as languages and secular sciences. We performed *Asr* in the mosque of the madrasa building.

After *Asr* prayers, we toured the surrounding area and, in particular, the traditional Chorsa Bazar, which is located under a blue dome-shaped building. Here, one can find all the various daily necessities, such as fruits, vegetables, various types of bread, dairy products, rice, colourful spices, nuts and dried fruits. The hustle and bustle of the Bazar is really a test of one's patience! It was the first and only time I saw two people having an altercation throughout our stay in Uzbekistan.

One also needs to be careful not to be pressurized into buying and/or getting deceived. The prices are relatively lower outside the dome market. We could not remain too long here and left the noise and bustle of the market.

Farewell Dinner

Our departure from Uzbekistan was in the evening. Two brothers from our host organization (Dār al-Hilāl)—Shaykh Fadhil and brother Rahmatullah—arranged a special farewell dinner for the three of us. We were taken to a traditional Khuwarizmi restaurant in the form of separate eating tents/pavilions in a garden. Fish was taken from a pool within the garden and freshly cooked for us, in addition to other traditional food items. We reflected on our stay in Uzbekistan, promised to stay in contact and assist one another in future *da'wa* work. After dinner, we headed to Tashkent International Airport for the npr departure. With this, our amazing and enjoyable visit to Uzbekistan sadly came to an end.

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CONCLUDING REMARKS

Uzbekistan is a unique and special country in many ways. Firstly, as outlined throughout this book, it is a place from where some of the greatest personalities of our illustrious history have hailed. Whether scholars of hadith (*muḥaddithūn*), jurists (*fuqahā*), scholars of Islamic creed/theology (*ʿaqīda*), saints (*awliyā*) or great sufi masters, this land has produced them all. As such, it is a blessed land and its air and atmosphere is filled with the aroma of these great men of Allah. Shaykh al-Islam Mufti Muhammad Taqī Usmanī (may Allah protect him) stated on many occasions during our visit that he can “smell the fragrance of great scholars and saints in the air of this land.” I believe this is the domain of only people of his calibre. Many of us tend to view things superficially, but those of deep spirituality look at things differently, beyond the apparent and external.

In a recent Urdu speech in London (after his visit to Uzbekistan), the respected Shaykh—whilst discussing the importance and benefits of visiting countries like Uzbekistan—mentioned that travelling to lands where great personalities of our *Umma* lived and breathed, enables one to benefit from their blessings. He stated that people generally go on vacations to various countries. Why not travel to countries like Uzbekistan, where one is able to enjoy a vacation, as well as benefit from the blessed fragrance and spirituality of the land. Places like Bukhara, Samarqand and Tashkent, and Transoxiana in general, have produced

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so many great luminaries—such that even the Arab world has not produced as many; and some Companions (*ṣaḥāba*) are also buried there. The entire region was once populated by scholars and saints. The respected Shaykh stated that he remembers reading a book, wherein the author said, “I find it difficult to walk on the streets of Bukhara wearing slippers/shoes because a great scholar may have lived here or is buried here.” As such, he stated, the air of lands where great men of Allah lived and breathed becomes blessed, even if centuries pass and revolutions occur; their fragrance remains in the atmosphere. Today, scientific research confirms that spoken words and sounds do not disappear completely; rather, they remain in the atmosphere. Therefore, if a land is filled for approximately 600 hundred years with sounds of hadith recital, remembrance of Allah (*dhikr*), Qur’an recitation, call of *adhān*, men of Allah engaged in worship, then it too does not evaporate. The air of these lands is not empty. Rather, it is filled with the fragrance, light (*nūr*) and spirituality of these great scholars and saints. This is analogous with areas which are contaminated by the poisonous effects of Allah’s punishment, which descended there. Thus, one is advised to avoid such areas, as per the directive of the hadith (end of Shaykh Taqi Usmani’s summarized words).

In view of the above, Uzbekistan is a special country which should be in the ‘countries to visit’ list of every Muslim. One should travel with the intention of benefitting from the blessings and spirituality of that land, breathing the air where the great men of Allah breathed, and connecting oneself with our heritage and tradition.

Secondly, Uzbekistan—and central Asia as a whole—serves as a great reminder of the Qur’anic directive, “*Such days We rotate among the people, so that Allah may know those who believe and let some of you be martyrs*” (Qur’an 3: 140). This region was once a centre of Islamic learning and prosperity, but then had to endure two periods of great test and tribulation. Firstly, when Genghis Khan and his brutal army murdered hundreds of thousands of Muslims and destroyed mosques and other religious symbols and, secondly, during the recent commu-

nist Soviet era when Muslims were severely persecuted. As such, the light of faith was followed by darkness of disbelief. Thereafter, light returned, but once again followed by darkness in the form of communism. *Al-Ḥamdu lillāh*, the light of faith has once again returned to this land, since independence from the Soviet Union. We pray that it remains till the end of time, *Āmīn*.

Thirdly, the people of Uzbekistan serve as a great lesson for the rest of us. They endured extreme hardships during the communist era, but still managed to preserve their faith (*īmān*) and emerge as Muslims—as our respected Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him) said to the locals, “You have truly tasted the sweetness of faith, due to your struggles. We were given Islam for free, without having to endure any hardship.” Seeing the Muslims of Uzbekistan and interacting with them can really teach one how to preserve one’s faith in times of oppression. In the same recent London speech, the Shaykh mentioned that, “If they were able to keep their faith intact, despite adversity, we should be able to do so to a greater extent.”

In my personal experience of interacting with Muslims in Uzbekistan, I have nothing but words of praise for them. The country is very clean and well maintained, as opposed to some other Muslim countries, and one seldom finds filth on the roads and streets. After independence, the country has undergone a restoration program with well-built houses, buildings and beautiful mosques to be seen everywhere. Likewise, the people of Uzbekistan are some of the most polite and pleasant I have seen. When asked for my impression regarding the country on our final day, I responded by saying, “I see this country as a beautiful and clean country, both externally and internally. The country is externally clean, and the hearts of the people are also very clean.” The communist experience, in my opinion, has made them stronger in their faith and conviction. Family values are generally upheld, the desire to learn about Islam is evidently visible, and love for the *Dīn* and the people of *Dīn* is manifest. The way they treat scholars and those connected to the *Dīn* is astonishing, and

there was no greater evidence for us, in this regard, than to see how they treated our dear and respected Shaykh Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him). Muslims in their droves came out just to have a glimpse of him, greet him and listen to his words. Students of sacred knowledge were very eager to sit in his company and learn from him and, despite not being worthy, they would even approach students like this writer for guidance on Islamic matters. I remember a few students being so persistent in their desire to read a book or two during our stay that, despite informing them I was unworthy, they did not give up. Nevertheless, it showed their desire and zeal for knowledge (*‘ilm*), such that anyone they felt was connected to Islamic knowledge, they would seek to learn from them. I felt a great thirst for *‘ilm* within them, as if they had missed out on knowledge and aspects of the *Dīn*, due to undergoing a period of detachment from it during the era of communism.

The general public's love for Islam is manifest even on the streets, amongst those not normally considered as practising Muslims by their external demeanour. I did not feel anyone looked at us in a sarcastic manner due to us growing beards or dressed in a specific manner—as opposed to even some Arab and Muslim countries, where, at times, people may look down upon you. While walking in the streets, people would come and greet us. The habit of making *du‘ā* and asking others to supplicate on one's behalf is very common. It seems they have a habit of making *du‘ā* at any given occasion, such as after eating, departing or greeting. I witnessed on many occasions that, as we were about to depart in our cars for another location, the locals would stand near the car door and request a farewell *du‘ā*. They appear to be very friendly people with beautiful smiles emanating from their faces. Even staff at airport security seemed friendly, and I did not come across unpleasant police officers loitering around the streets.

Fourthly and finally, despite all the above, the recent communist era has undoubtedly had an effect on the country and its people, and thus we find many members of the general public not acquainted with

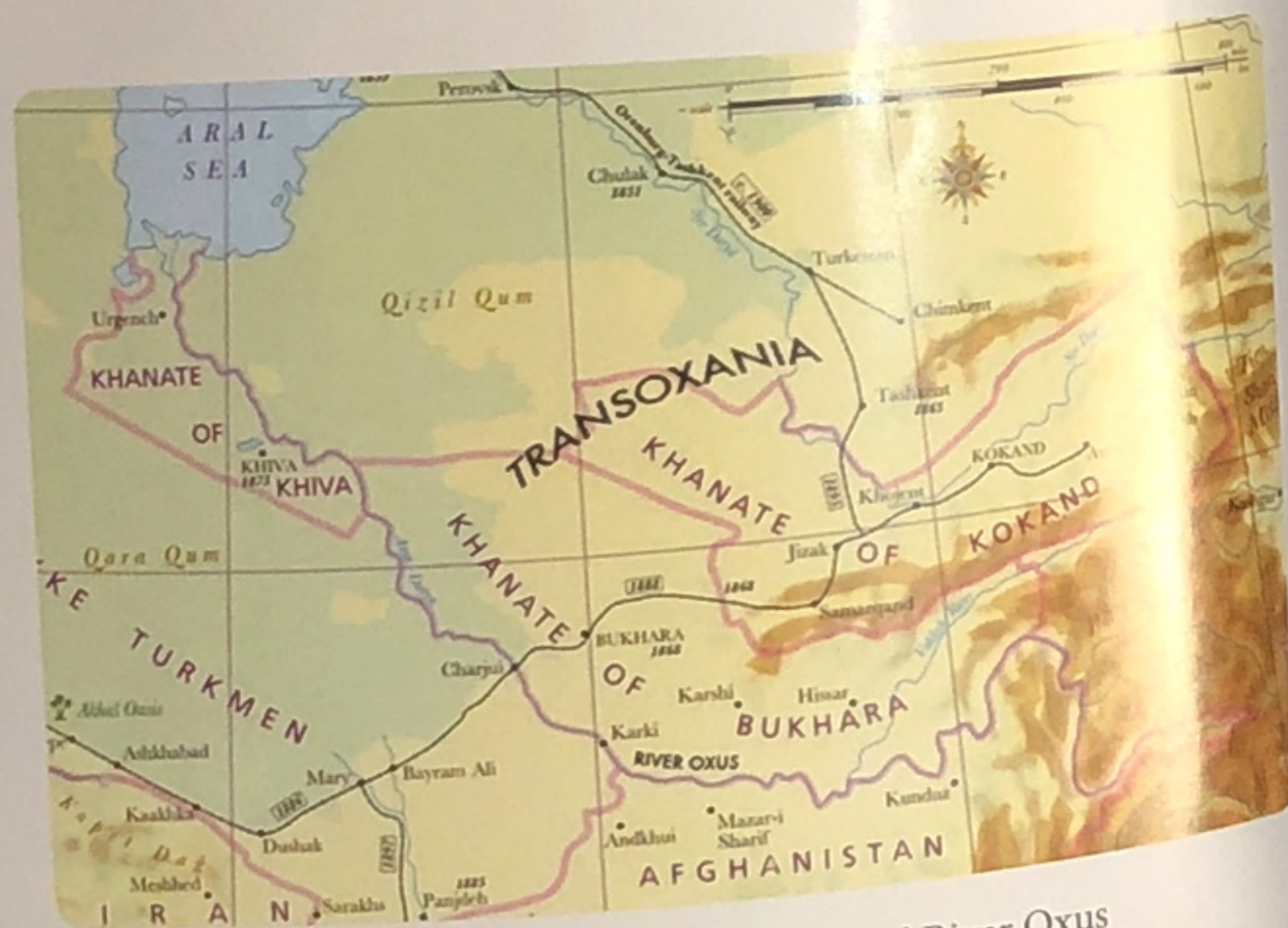
even the basics of Islam. Some are also poor and in impoverished conditions. It is easy to start judging them when touring the country, but one must always keep in mind what they have been through. The communist regime that ruled here for many decades banned the practice of Islam, and basic acts of worship, such as prayer and fasting, were considered a crime. Therefore, as Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him) mentioned, it is our duty to help and assist our Uzbek brothers and sisters in whatever form we can—be it in terms of *da‘wa* and bringing them closer to Islam, or monetary and financial support. May Allah protect them and bring back the golden days of Islam and Muslims to this land, *Āmīn*.

We visited a total of four cities: Bukhara, Samarqand, Tirmidh and Tashkent. However, there are also other places worth visiting such as the Fergana Valley, Khuwarizm, Nasaf, Kasan and Qarshi. The other countries of central Asia, such as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, are also worth visiting. On our return from Uzbekistan, I and my two colleagues spent two days in Kazakhstan, regarding which I hope to pen a separate article, *in shā Allah*. And Allah alone grants success.

*Colour Images
of the Blessed Trip*



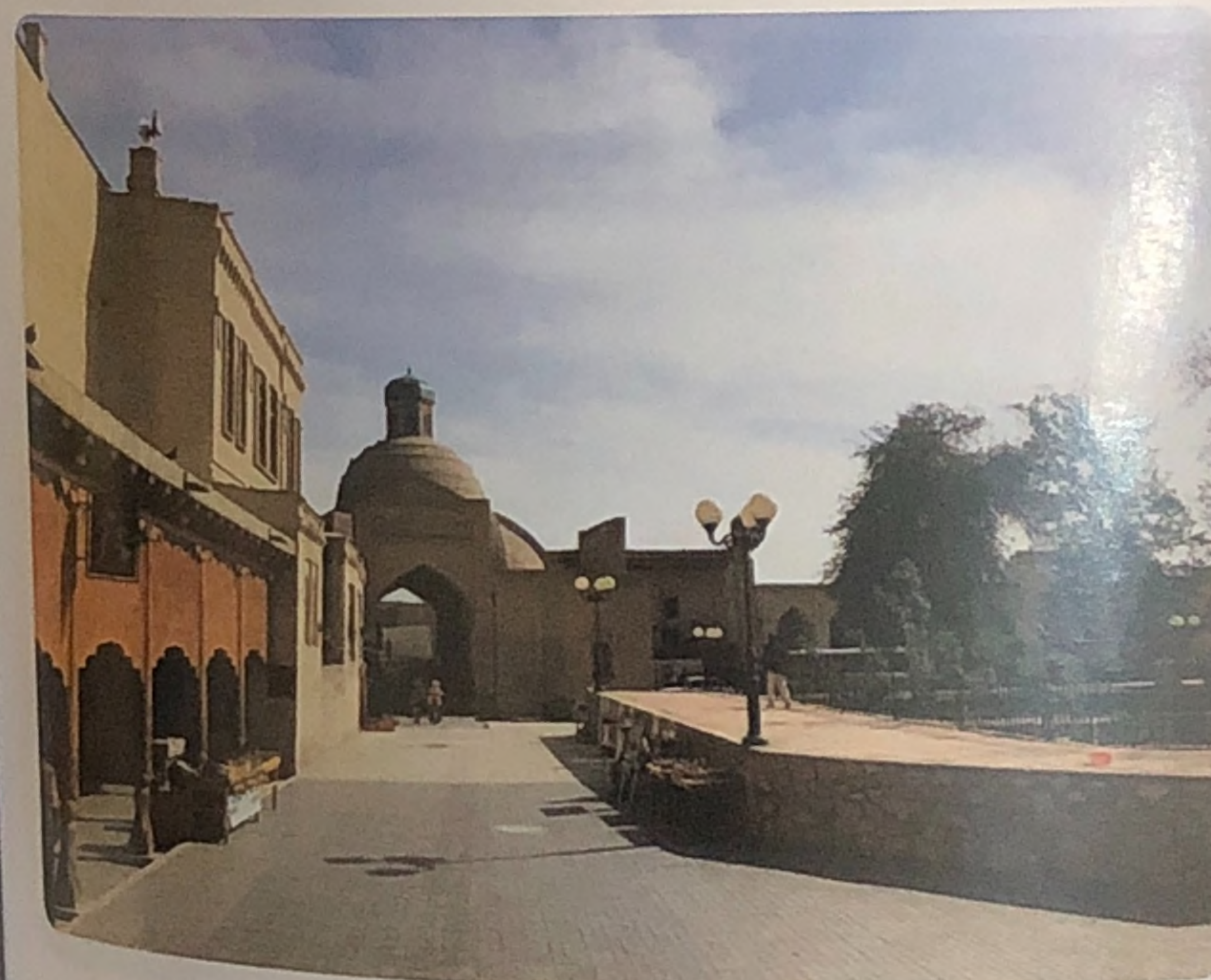
Political map of Uzbekistan and surrounding countries



Historical map of Transoxiana and River Oxus



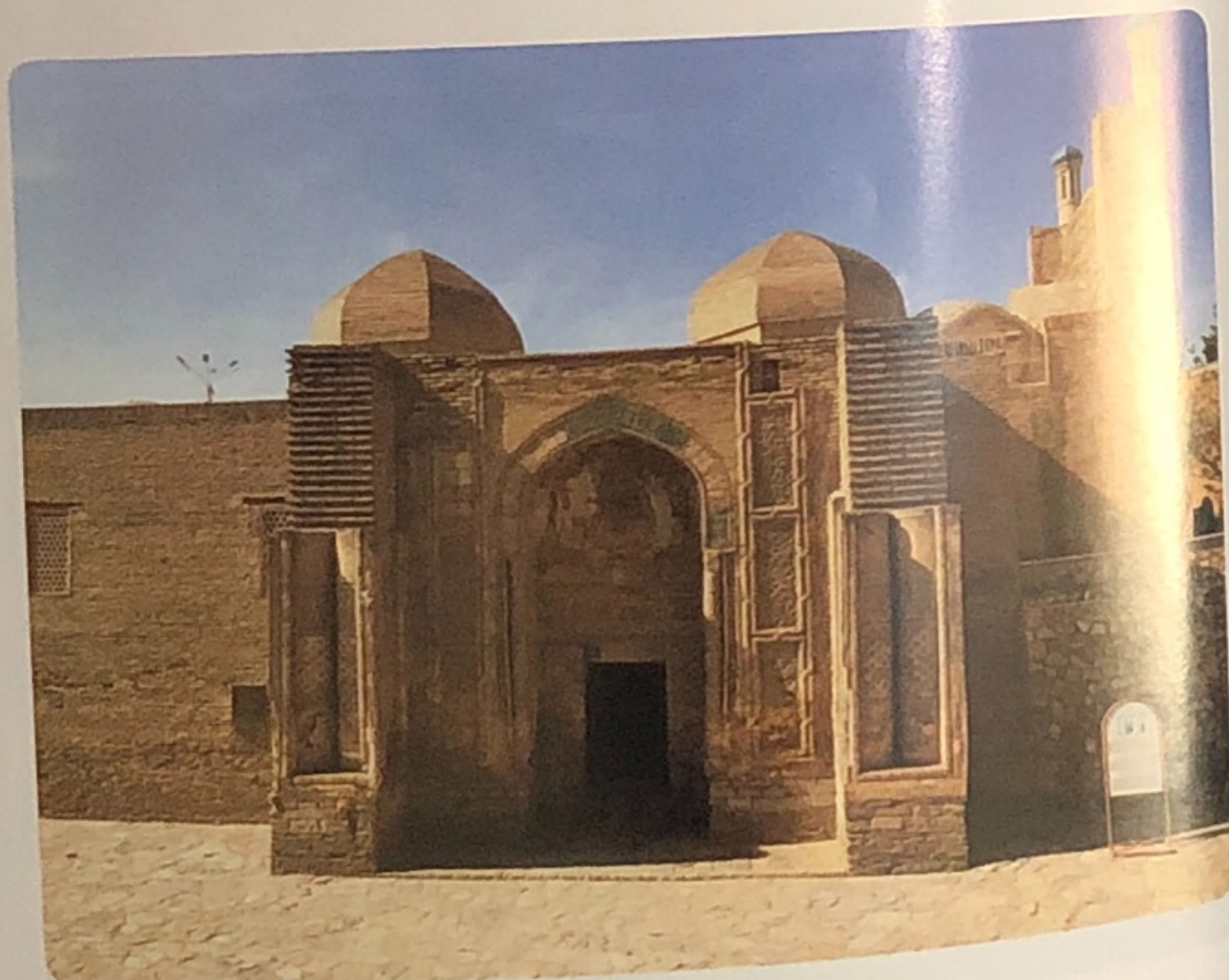
Bukhara Airport terminal building



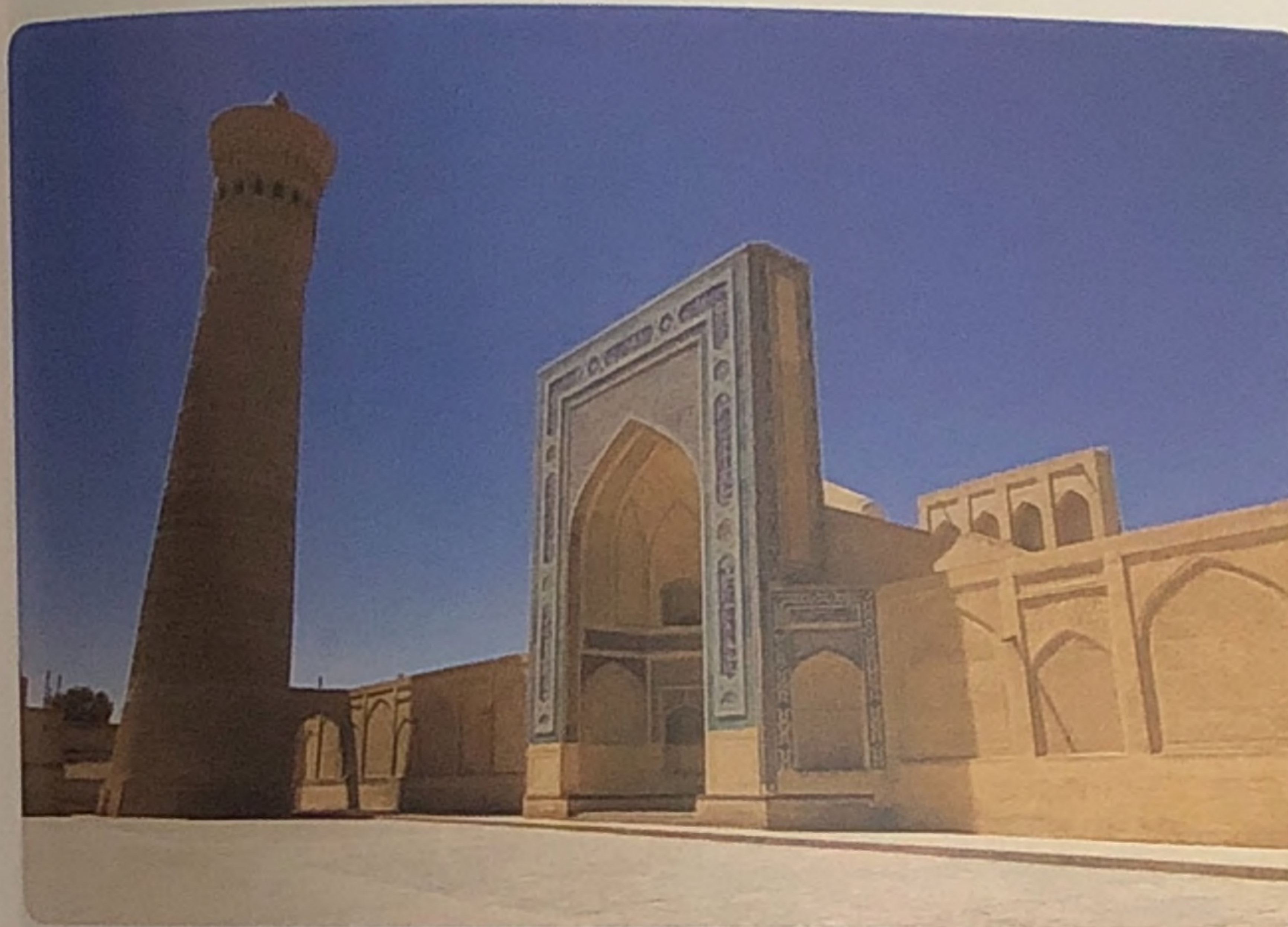
Pathway in Bukhara old city



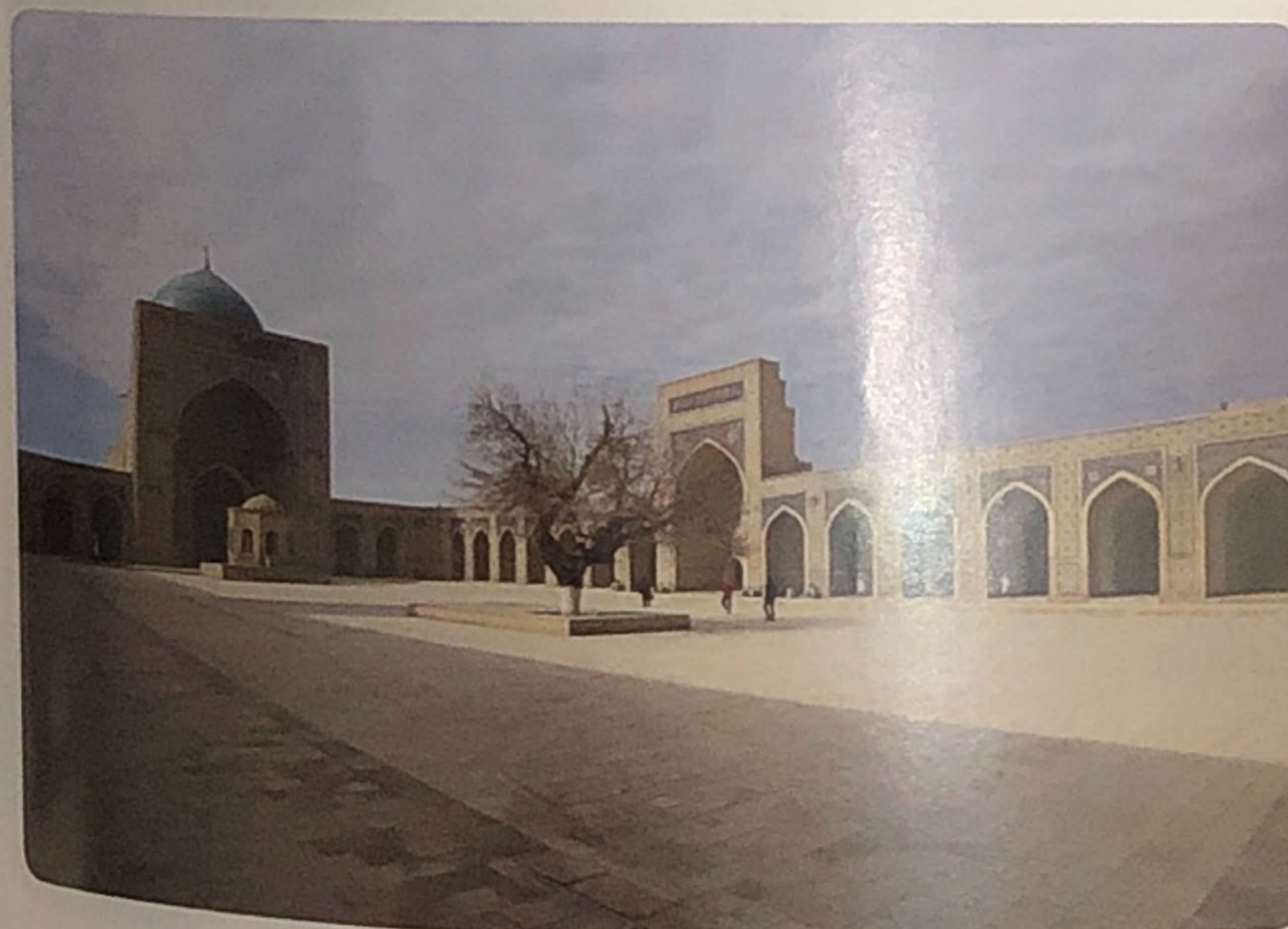
Student dorms of Kokaldosh Madrasa



The historic Magok-i-Attari Mosque, Bukhara



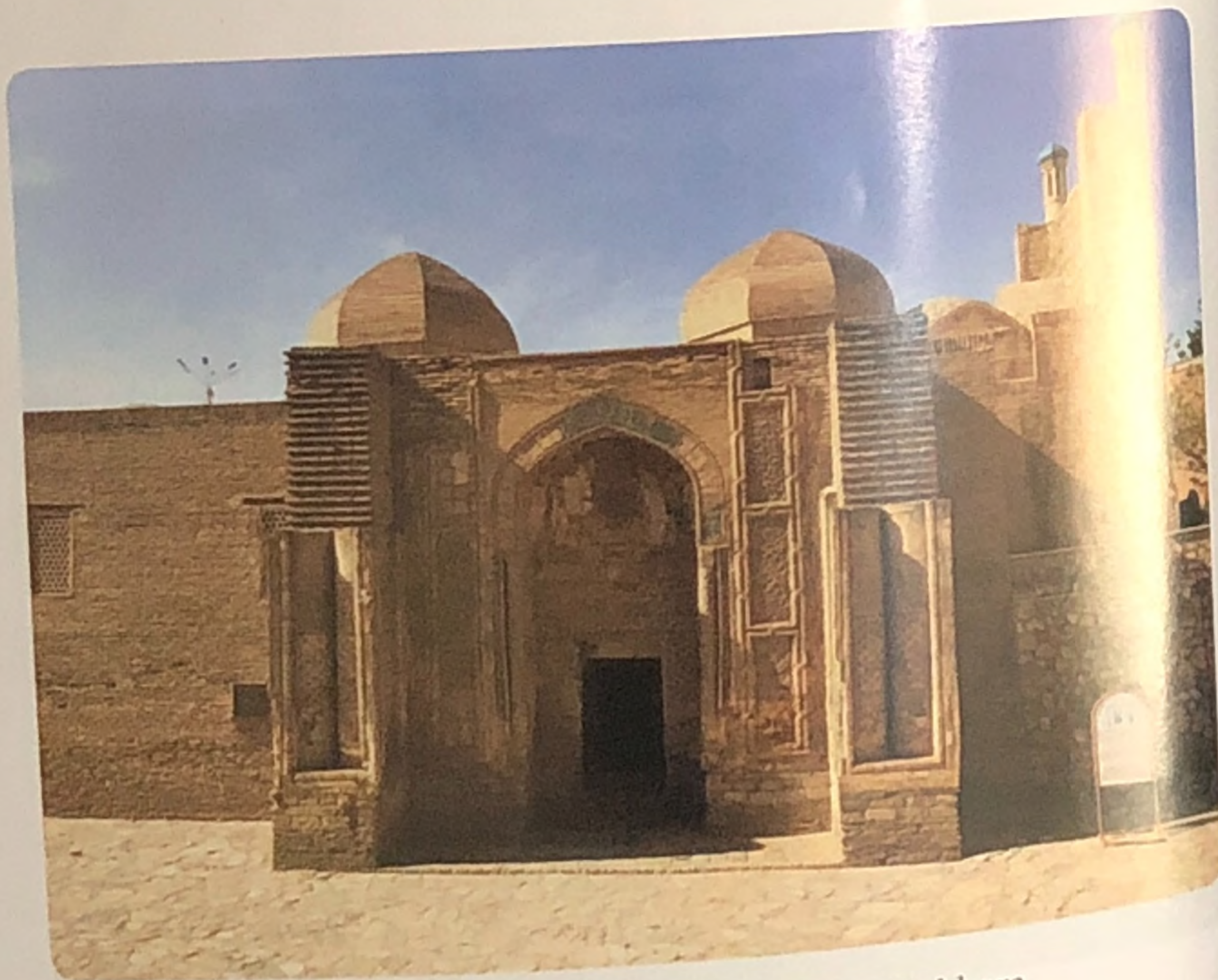
The Kalan Mosque and Minaret in Bukhara



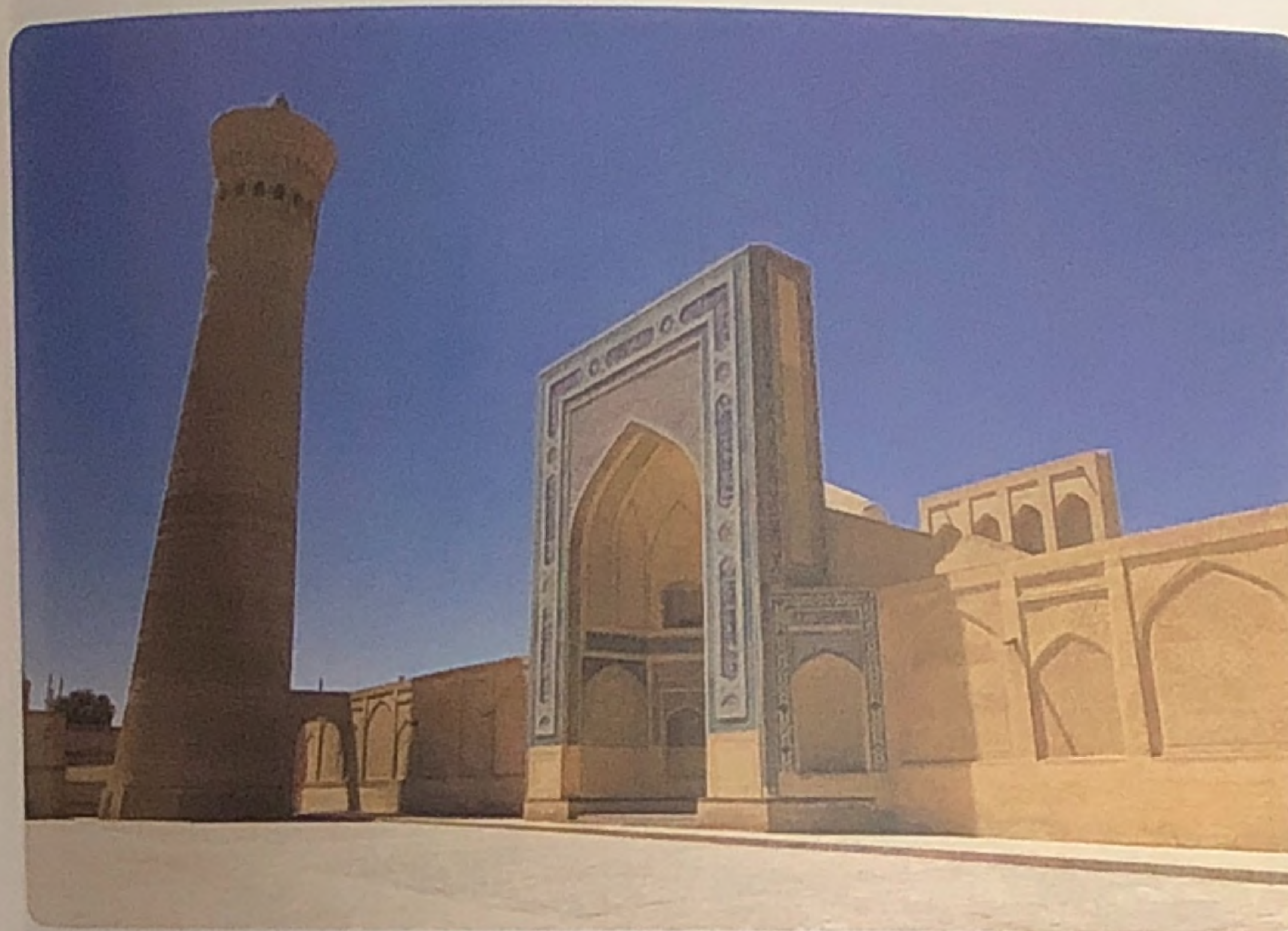
Courtyard of Kalan Mosque



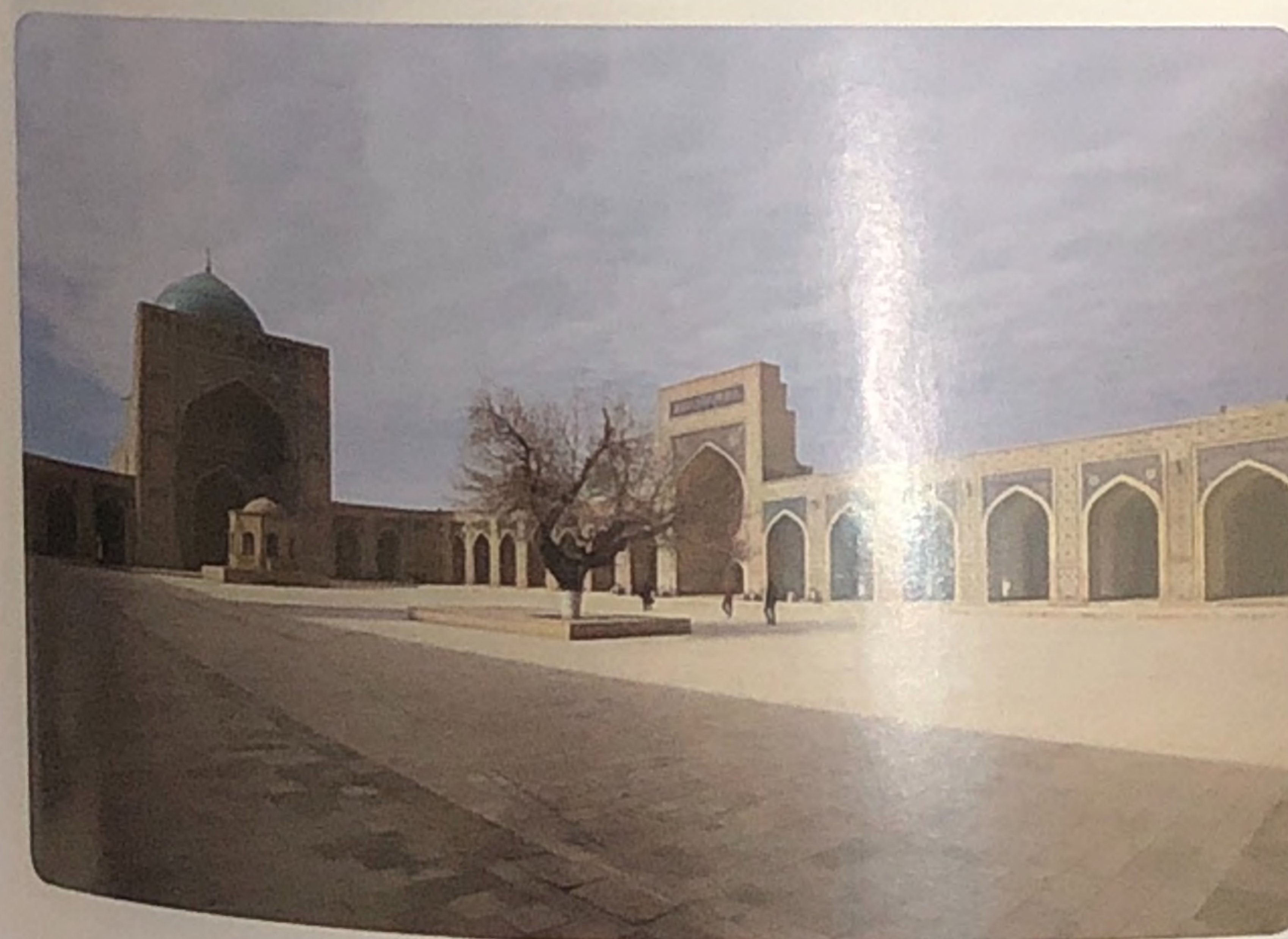
Student dorms of Kokaldosh Madrasa



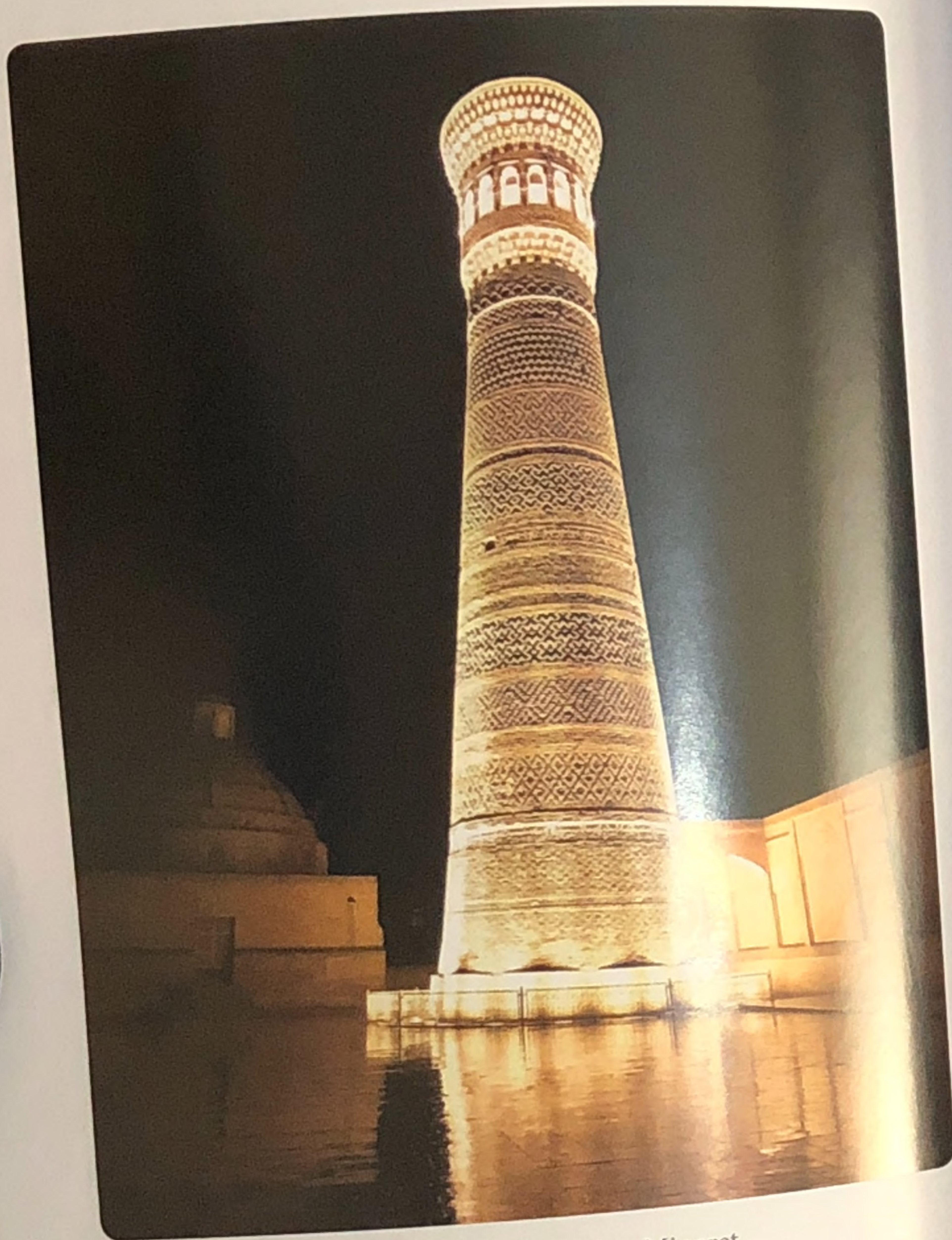
The historic Magok-i-Attari Mosque, Bukhara



The Kalan Mosque and Minaret in Bukhara



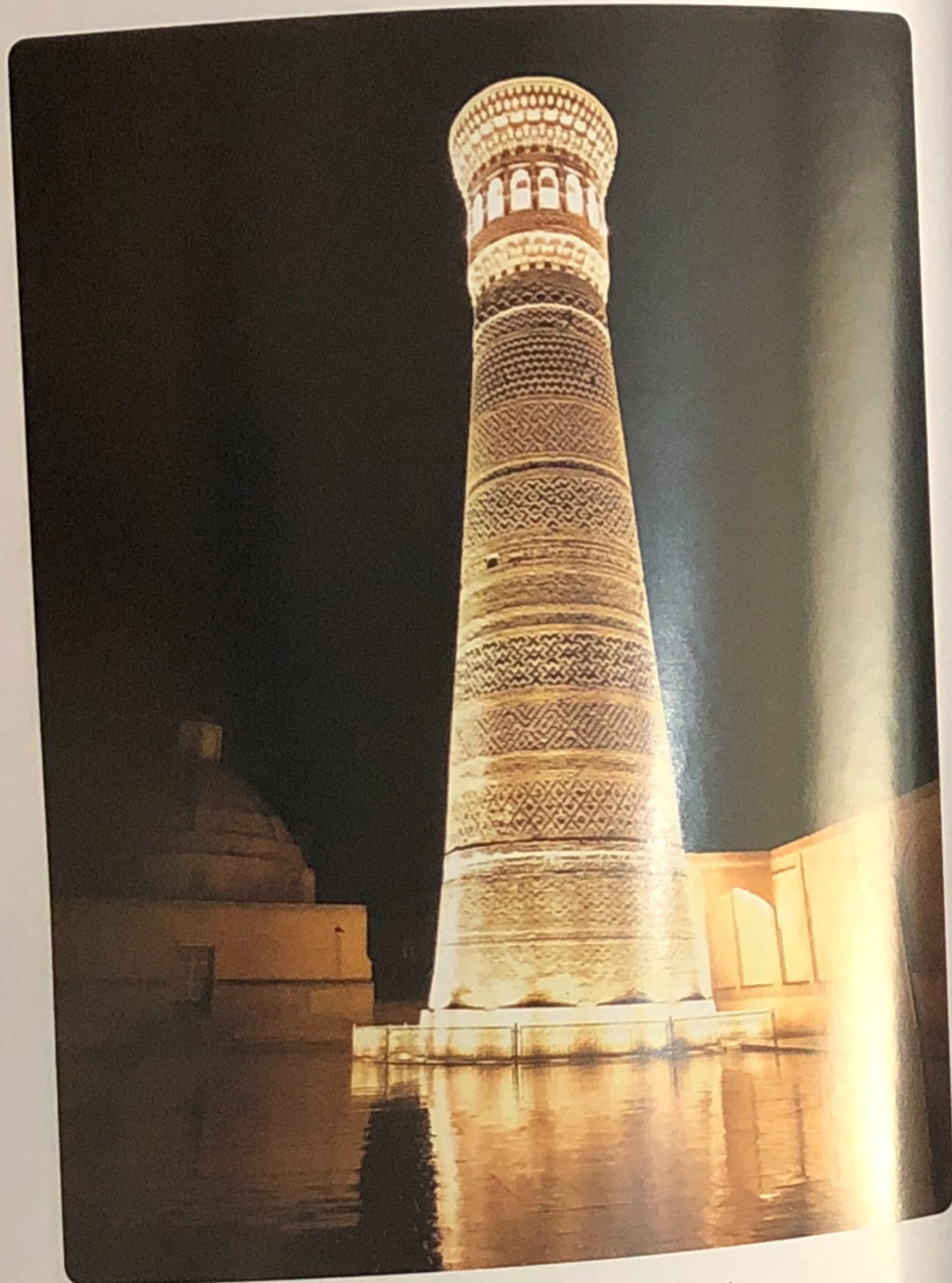
Courtyard of Kalan Mosque



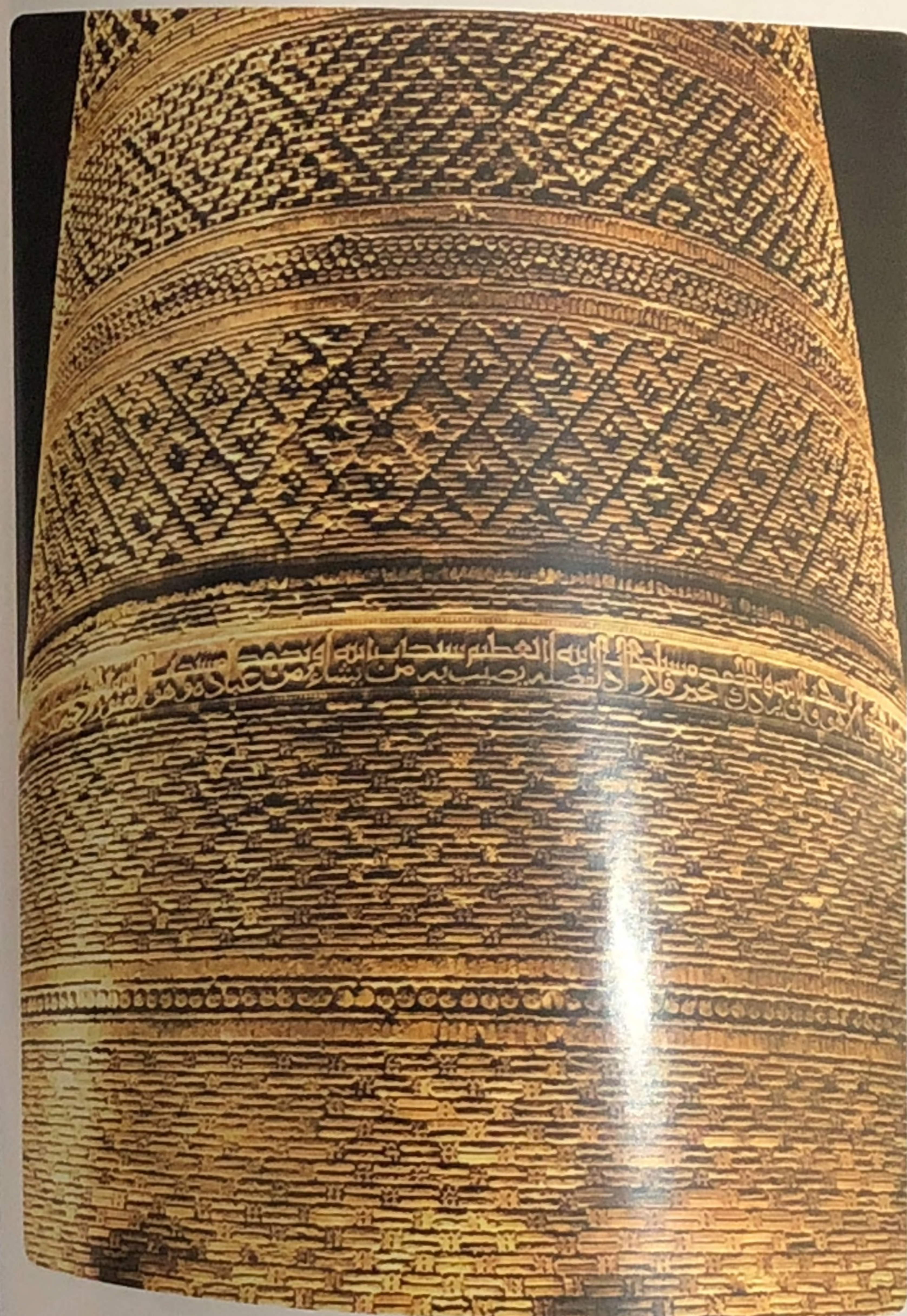
Night view of the Kalan Minaret



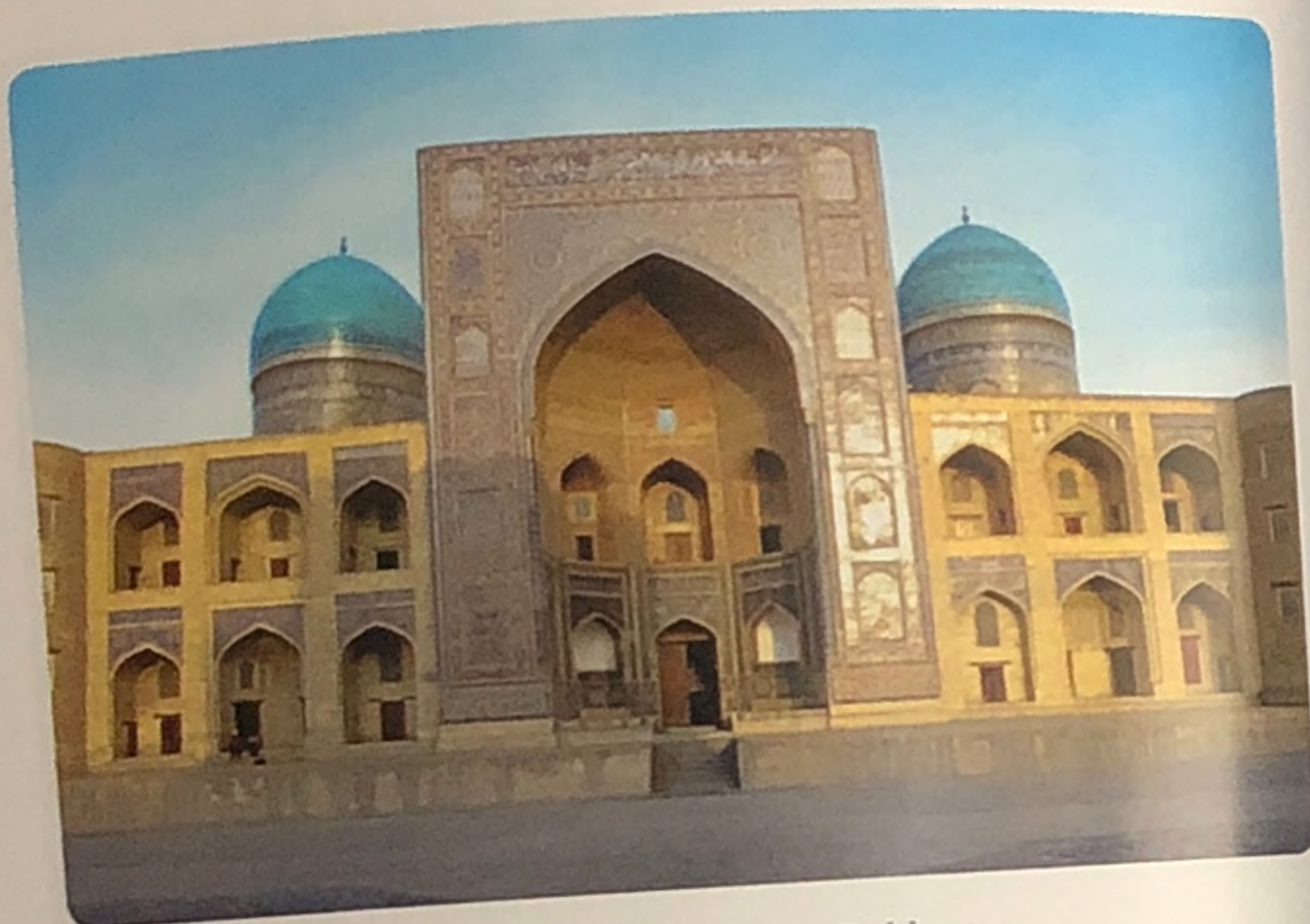
Qur'anic verses inscribed on the minaret



Night view of the Kalan Minaret



Qur'anic verses inscribed on the minaret



Mir Arab Madrasa in Bukhara



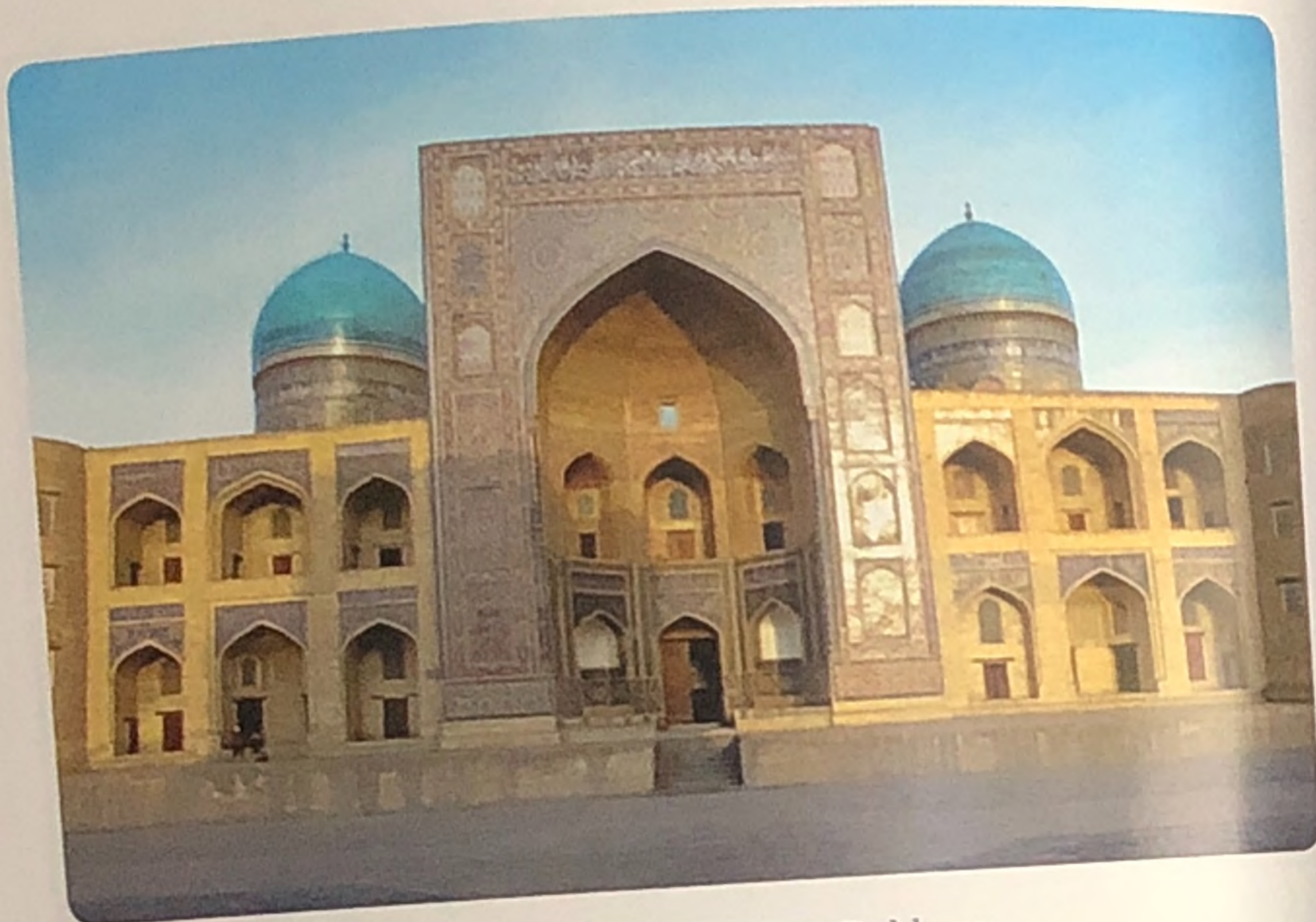
Grave of Shaykh Bahā al-Dīn Naqshband, Bukhara



Graves of Imam Abū Ḥafṣ al-Kabīr & Abū Ḥafṣ al-Ṣaghīr, Bukhara



Grave of Shams al-A'imma al-Halwāni, Bukhara



Mir Arab Madrasa in Bukhara



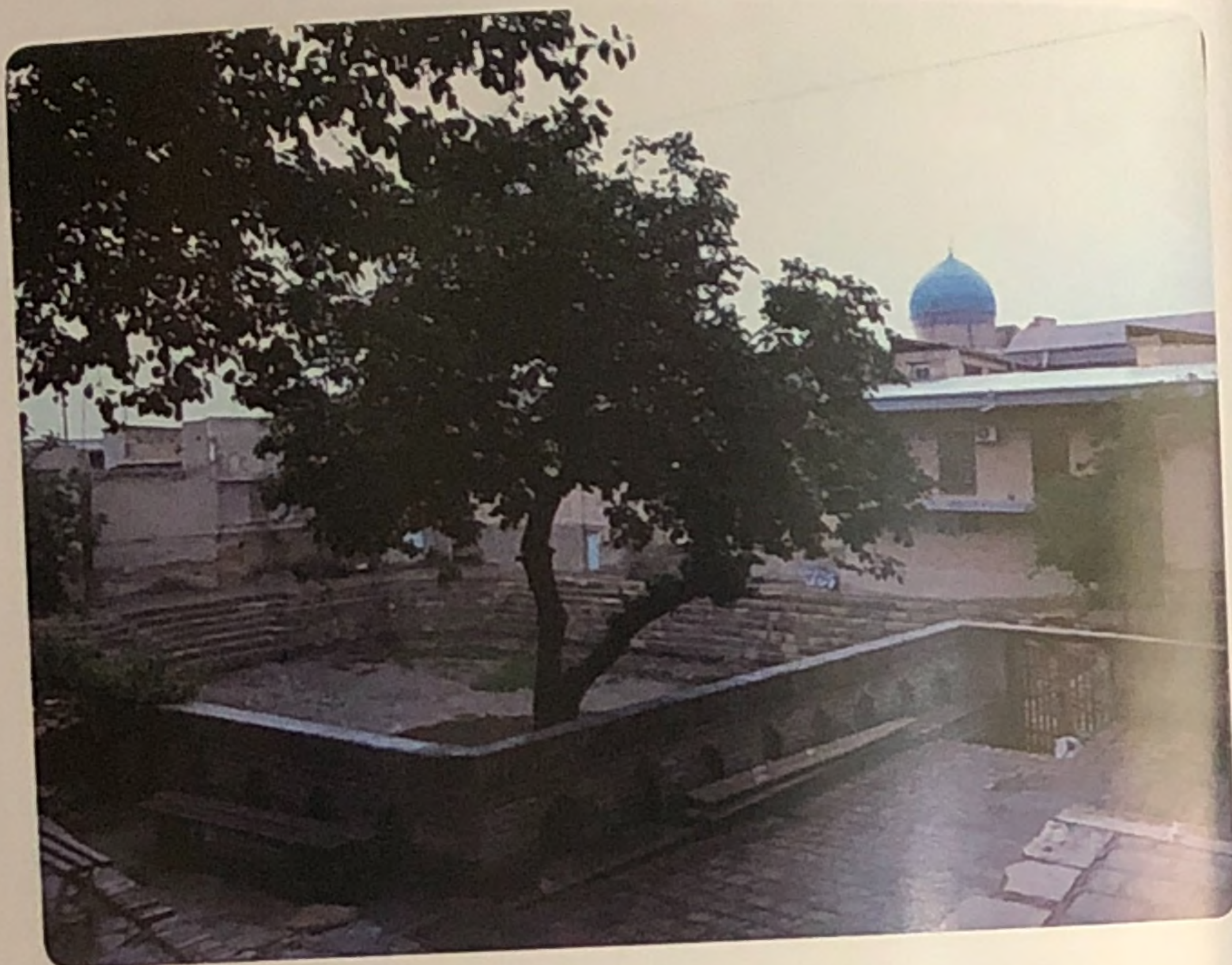
Grave of Shaykh Bahā al-Dīn Naqshband, Bukhara



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Grave of Shams al-A'imma al-Ḥalwānī, Bukhara



Birthplace of Imam Bukhari



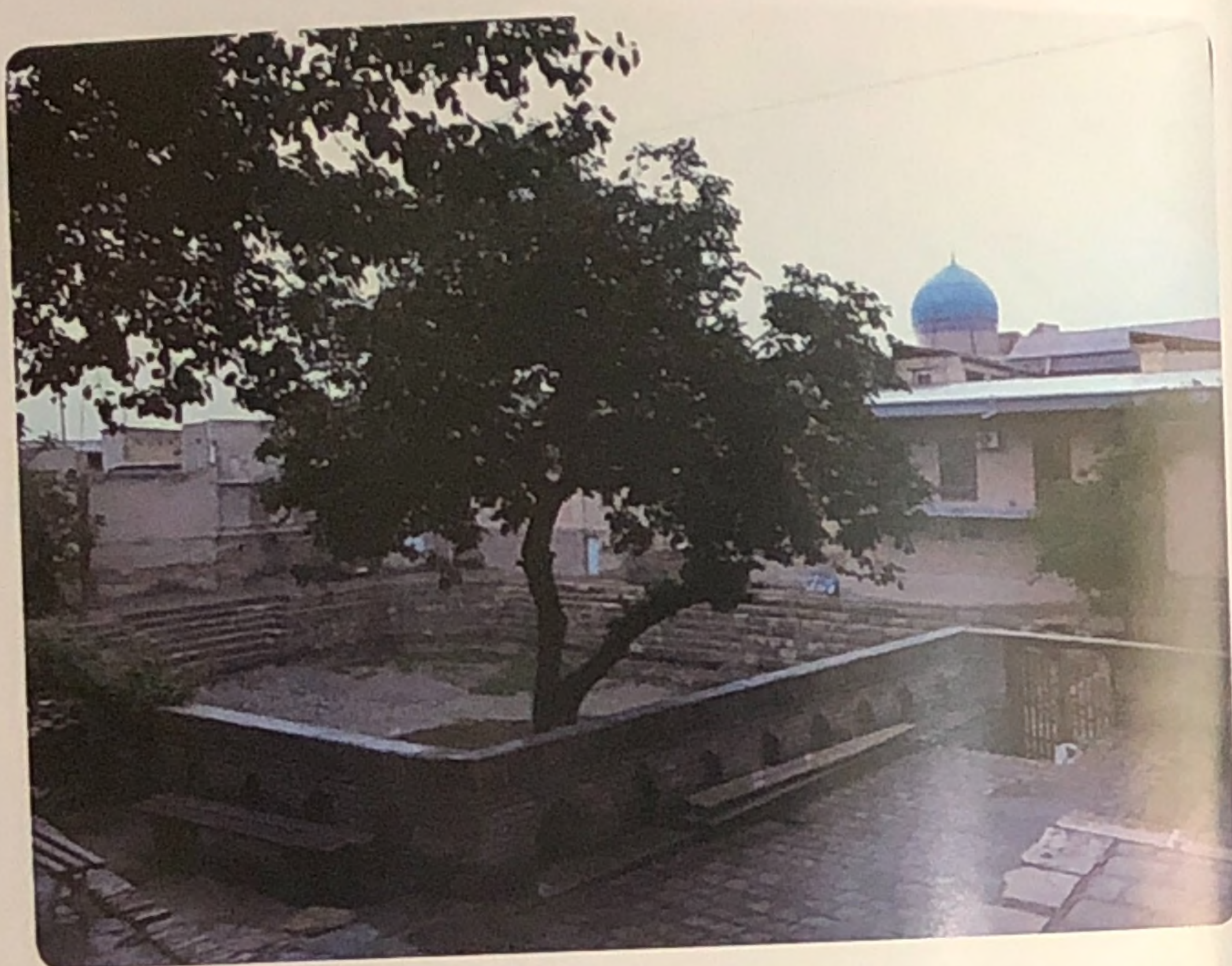
Birthplace of Imam Bukhari



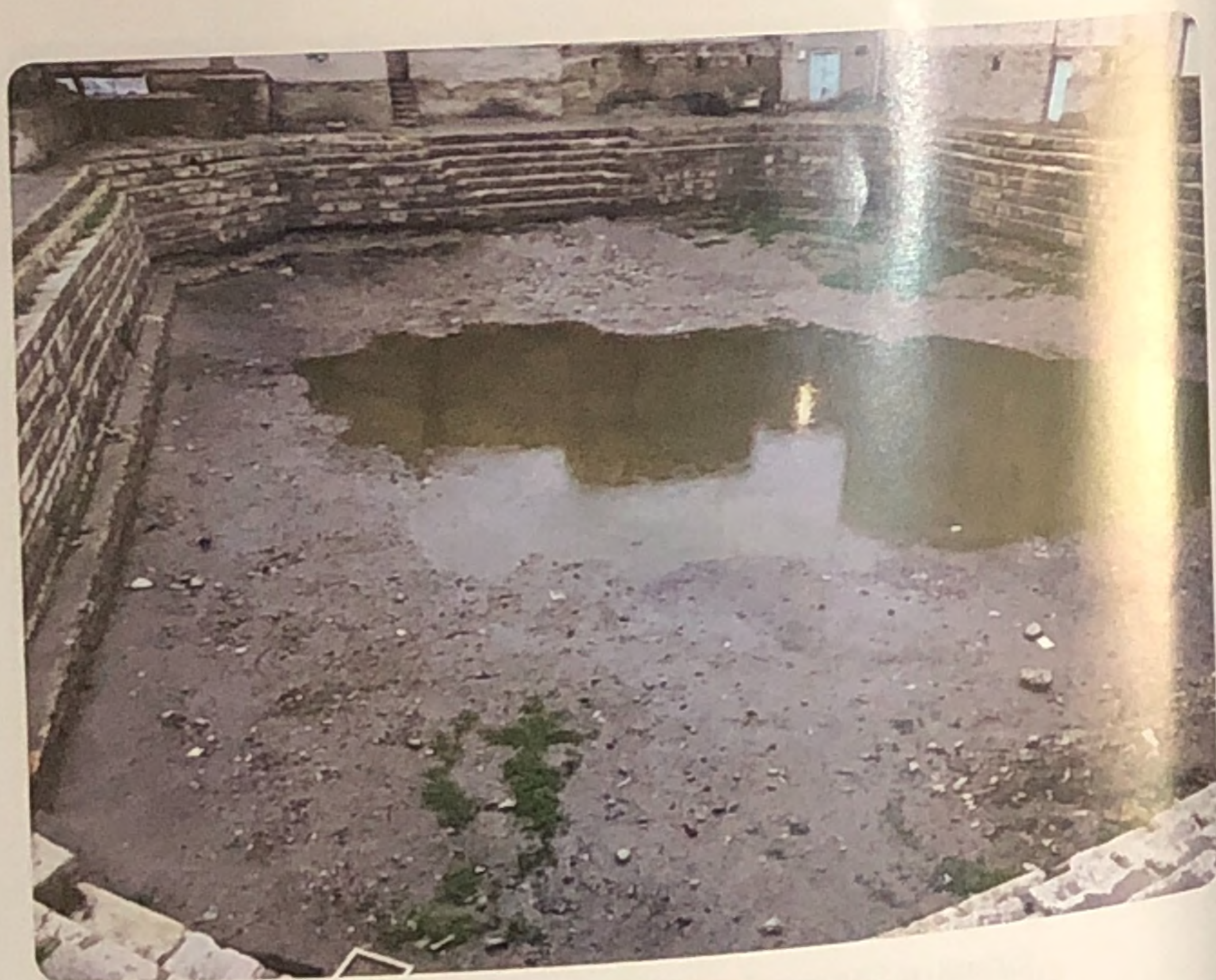
Grave of Imam Bukhari outside Samarqand



Imam Bukhari memorial complex & research centre



Birthplace of Imam Bukhari



Birthplace of Imam Bukhari



Grave of Imam Bukhari outside Samarqand



Imam Bukhari memorial complex & research centre



Meridian arch, Ulugh Beg Observatory, Samarqand



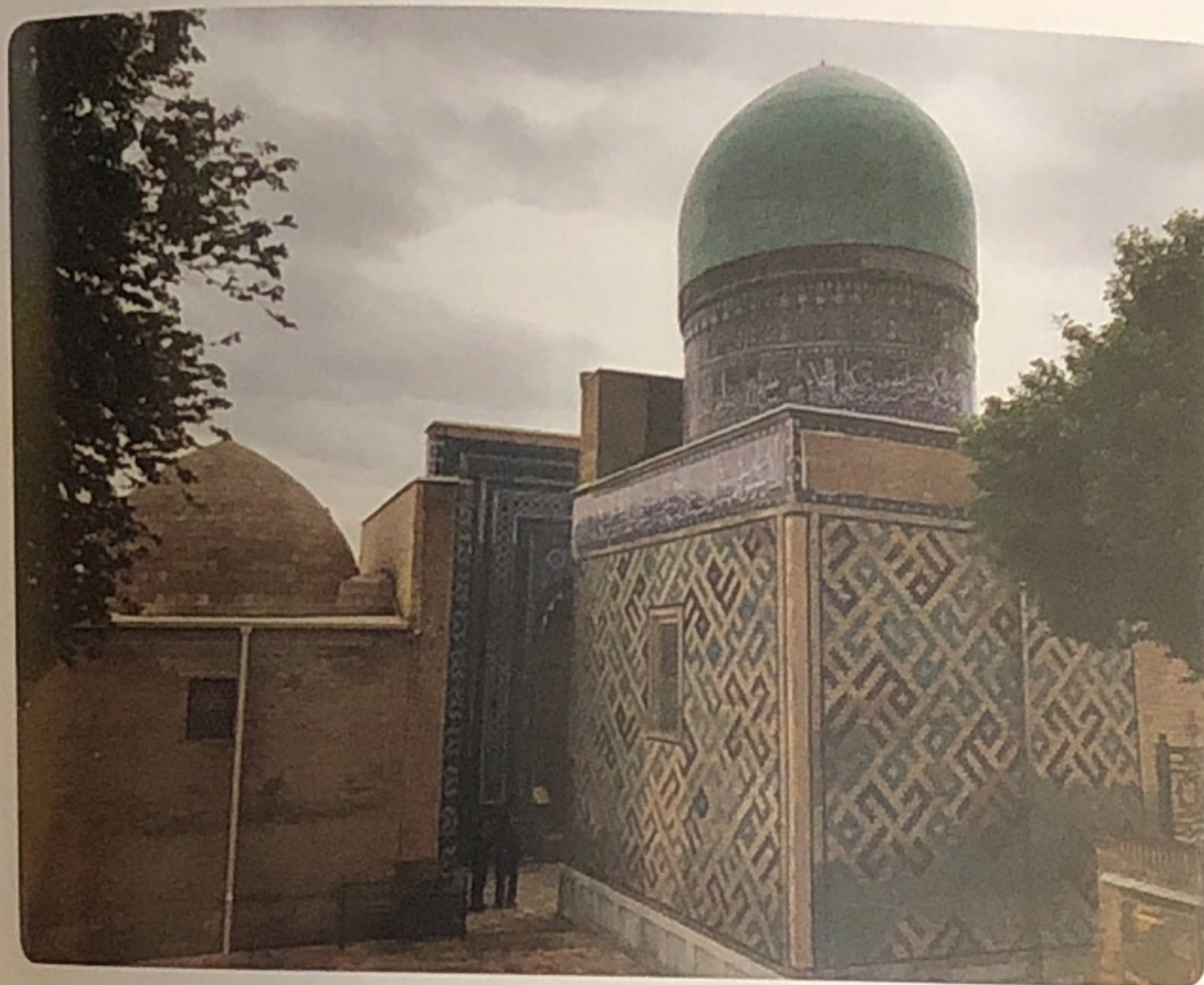
Shah Zinda ensemble, Samarqand



Grave of Imam Abū Manşūr al-Māturīdī, Samarqand



Meridian arch, Ulugh Beg Observatory, Samarqand



Shah Zinda ensemble, Samarqand



Grave of Imam Abū Manşūr al-Māturīdī, Samarqand



Grave of the Companion Qutham ibn 'Abbās, Samarqand



Termez (Tirmidh) Airport



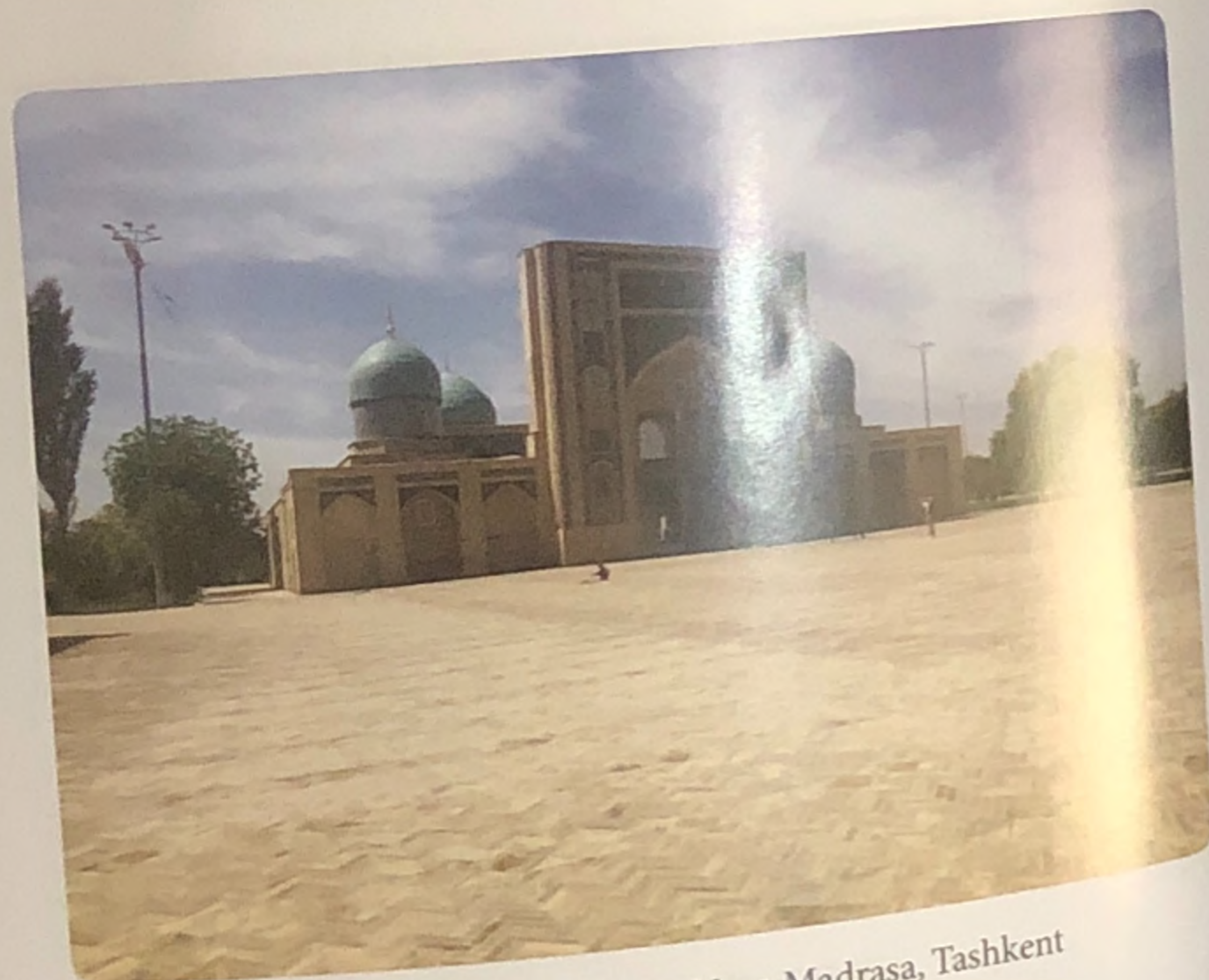
Imam Tirmidhi grave complex outside Tirmidh



Grave of Imam Tirmidhi



Hast-Imam complex and Mosque, Tashkent



Historical building of Barakhan Madrasa, Tashkent



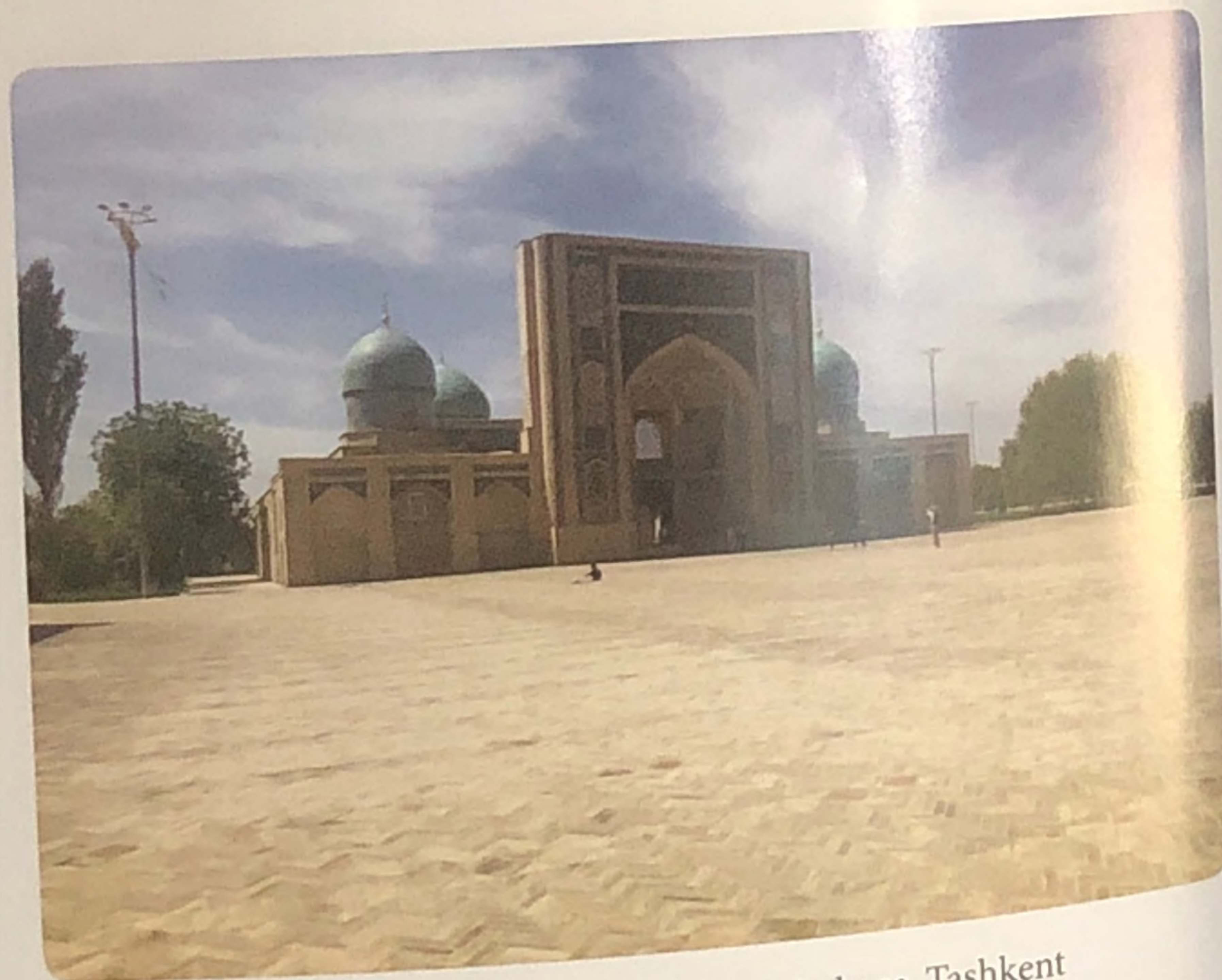
Al-Mushaf al-Uthmani chamber, Tashkent



Al-Mushaf al-Uthmani manuscript



Hast-Imam complex and Mosque, Tashkent



Historical building of Barakhan Madrasa, Tashkent



Al-Mushaf al-Uthmāni chamber, Tashkent



Al-Mushaf al-Uthmāni manuscript



Grave of Al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī, Tashkent



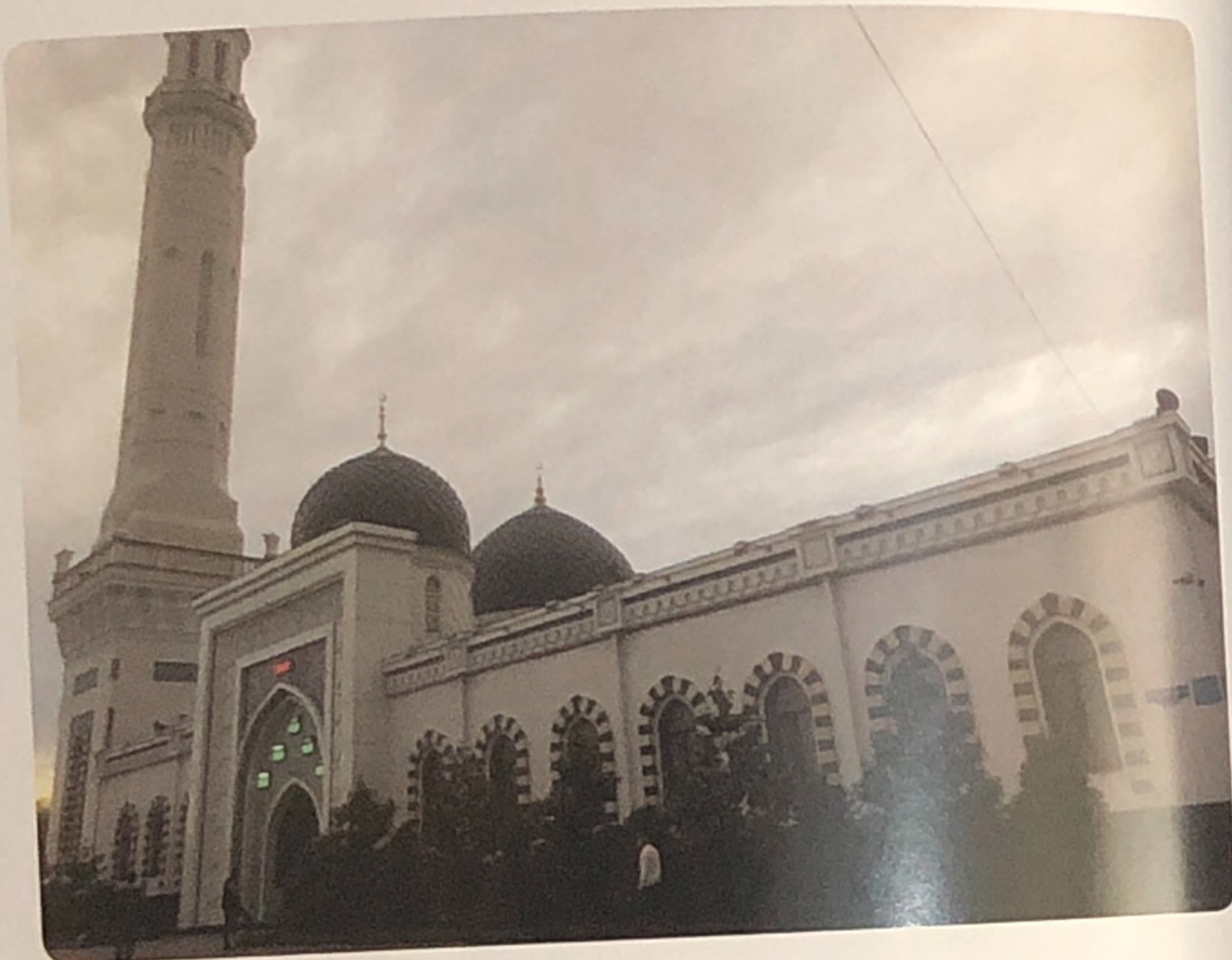
Entrance to Imam Bukhari Institute in Tashkent



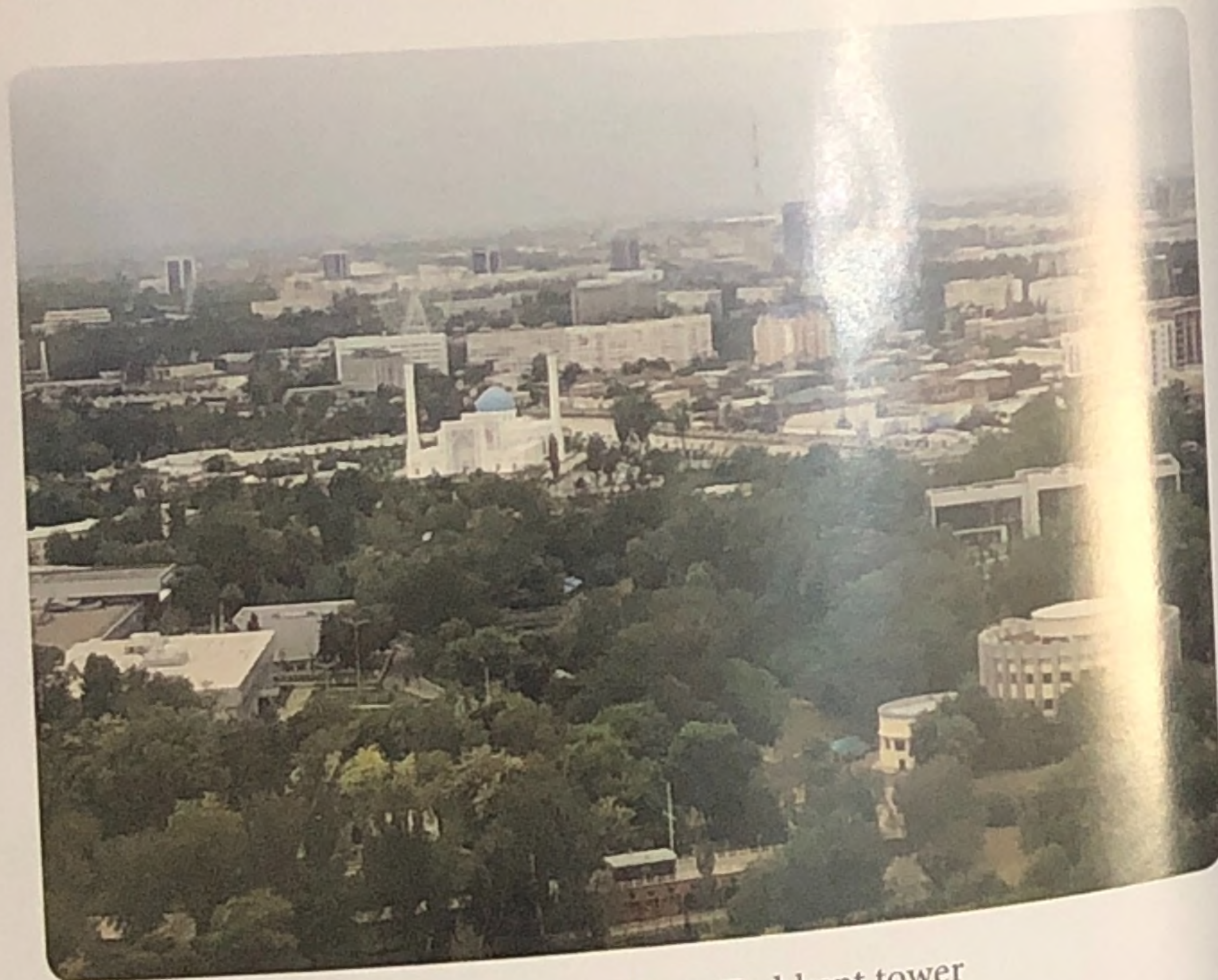
The beautiful Manār/Minār Mosque, Tashkent



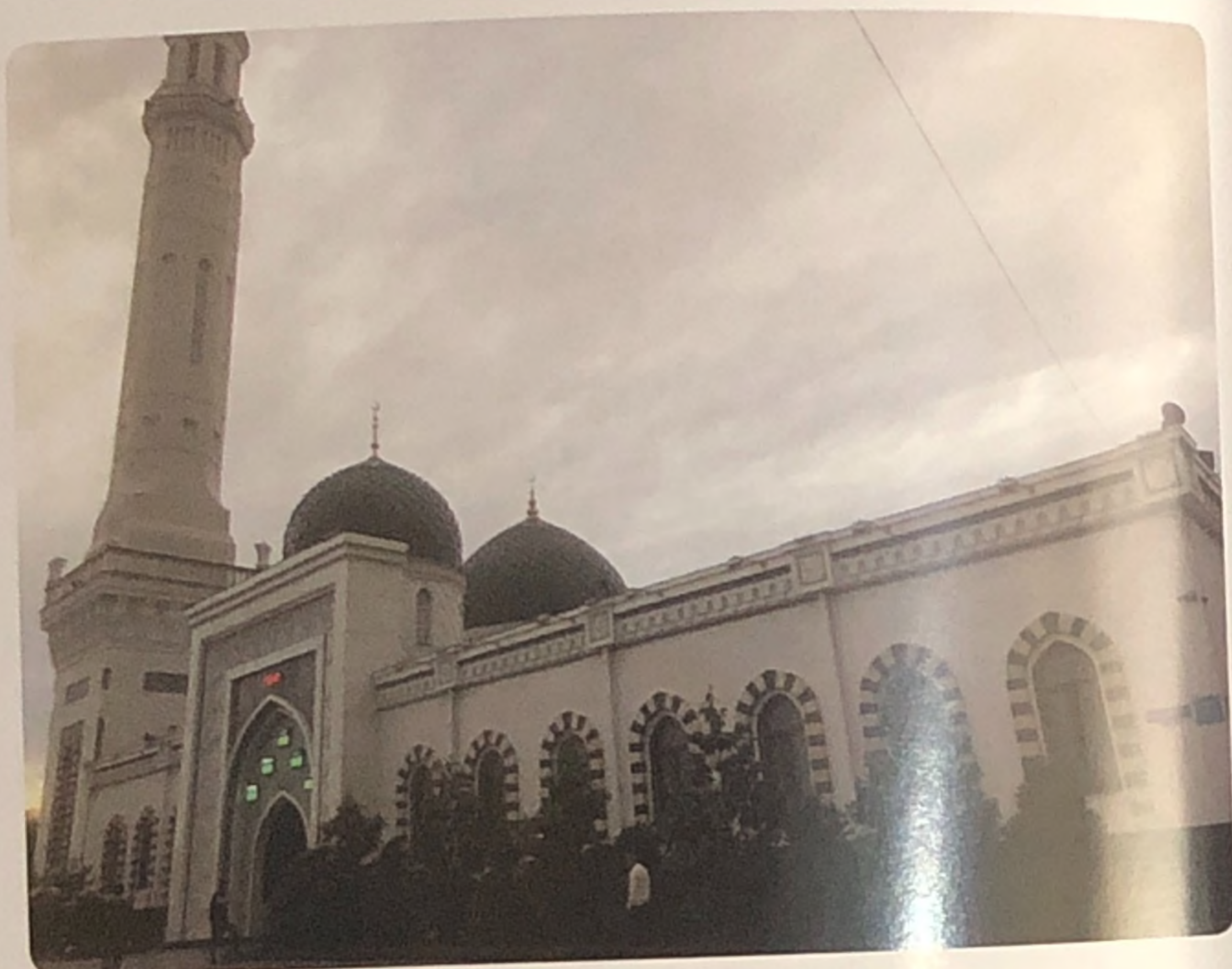
Newly built Shaykh Muhammad al-Ṣādiq Mosque complex, Tashkent



Shaykh Zayn al-Din Mosque, Tashkent



View of the city from Tashkent tower



Shaykh Zayn al-Din Mosque, Tashkent



View of the city from Tashkent tower

THE REGION OF CENTRAL ASIA in general, and Uzbekistan in particular, is steeped in Islamic history. Traditionally referred to as ‘*mā warā’ al-nahr*’ (lit. ‘what lies beyond the river’), it has produced some of the greatest scholars of hadith (*muhaddithūn*), jurists (*fuqahā*) and saints (*awliyā*) of our Umma. Regions and cities such as Samarqand, Bukhara, Shash, Tirmidh, Fergana, Khuwarizm are cited frequently in Islamic literature, and Bukhārī, Tirmidhī, Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī, Al-Marghīnānī, Abū ‘l-Layth al-Samarqandī, Shāshī, Nasafī and Ibn Sīnā are household names for anyone who has some degree of affiliation with Islamic learning.

A Trip to the Land of Scholars and Saints is a descriptive travelogue of a journey taken by the author to Uzbekistan during April 2019, in the company of Shaykh Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani (may Allah protect him). Four major cities were visited: Bukhara, Samarqand, Termez (Tirmidh) and Tashkent. It provides in-depth information on various historical sites and biographies of key personalities who graced that part of the world. In addition, beneficial points learned from Shaykh Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani during the trip have been gathered—including translations of almost all of his speeches delivered at various locations. A must-have companion for those interested in, or journeying to, Uzbekistan.

“I have paged through this travelogue and found it to be very beneficial for the English readership in rekindling its relationship with Islam’s heritage.”

—MUFTI MUHAMMAD TAQI USMANI, Dār al-‘Ulūm Karachi, Pakistan

“An excellent and inspiring account of Mufti Taqi Usmani’s historical visit to lands steeped in Islamic scholarly and spiritual tradition.”

—ABDUR-RAHMAN IBN YUSUF MANGERA, Whitethread Institute, UK

“An eloquent account of a beautiful and unique place filled with Islamic heritage.”

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